



THE MARRIAGE OF ARTHUR AND GUINEVERE

[Frontispiece]

KING ARTHUR

BEING STORIES FROM THE
IDYLLS OF THE KING

BY

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WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS
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I TELL these oft-told tales again :
Beloved Master, pardon me,
Who learnt my love of them from thee,
That thus thine Idylls I profane.

Forgive these halting words of mine :
Full well shall I attain my end
If, led by me, some others bend
Their steps to worship at thy shrine.

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INTRODUCTION

THESE stories are for the most part retold from Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, but for the opening part of the last two I have taken some hints from Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, one of the first books printed by Caxton. It was from Sir Thomas that Tennyson learnt most of the stories.

The life and manners described are not those of the time of King Arthur (the fifth century), but those of the time at which the tales were written, that is, of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In those days a soldier's was regarded as the most honourable of professions, and most youths of good birth hoped some day to become knights. Knighthood was the highest military honour they could win, and it was given by a very simple ceremony. The candidate knelt before a knight, received a slight blow on the shoulder with a sword, accompanied by the words "Arise, Sir So-and-so," and he was a knight forthwith.

As a moth passes through the stages of caterpillar and chrysalis, before becoming a moth, so the knight generally passed through the stages of page and squire before becoming a knight. As a page he was sent to some noble family where he waited on the ladies. Here he learnt obedience and politeness, and received such education as was usual for gentlemen. When he was old enough he became a squire, that is an attendant on a knight. His duties were to take care of his master's armour, to help

him prepare for battle, to learn the use of arms, and to fight when called upon to do so. He might never get beyond this stage, but if he proved a good squire, and above all if he distinguished himself in battle, he was knighted.

The favourite sports of knights were jousts and tournaments. In the former, two knights armed with lances and swords, and covered with armour from head to foot, would enter the "lists" (or field enclosed for the sport) at opposite ends. At a given signal they charged, and each tried to thrust the other from his saddle. If one was dismounted, the other would sometimes alight from his horse, and the fight was continued with swords. In tournaments, not two, but many knights fought. They were divided into two parties whose numbers were usually equal—though this last rule does not seem to have been always observed in King Arthur's days. Knobs of wood were generally fixed on the ends of the lances to prevent serious injuries: but this was not always done, and it was no uncommon thing for a man to have his limbs broken or even to be killed in these fights. All the jousts described in the following stories, however, seem to have been fought with sharp lances.

As for the origin of the tales, we know that there were Welsh legends of King Arthur, some of which were written down in Latin in the ninth or tenth century. In the twelfth century they were introduced into England, and for nearly two hundred years various French and English authors added to and altered them. Malory collected some of these stories and translated them into English, and Caxton printed them in 1485. Many authors have since written about them. Tennyson, who had loved them even as a boy, published four of his *Idylls* in 1859. *The Passing of Arthur* was, however, published seventeen years earlier, and *The Coming of Arthur* ten years later.

KING ARTHUR

THE COMING OF ARTHUR

LONG, long ago there lived in Britain a king named Arthur. Before his time for many years the Romans had ruled the land, and ruled it well. They had given its people civilization and peace, and under their sway the old cruel superstitions and human sacrifices of the Britons had been replaced by Christianity. But the Romans had troubles at home. Fierce tribes from the north attacked them, and they needed all their forces to protect their own land ; so they left Britain to take care of itself.

Now the Britons were pleased to get back their liberty, but they did not know how to use it. Many petty chiefs arose among them, and each made war on his neighbour. They laid waste great parts of the land, and so many people were killed that forests grew up where there had before been fertile fields. These forests sheltered wolves and other wild beasts, and worse still, robbers, so that no one could travel safely from one place to another. Then came the heathen Saxons across the seas, killing men, women, and children alike, stealing everything they could carry away, and burning towns and churches, so that Britain was in a very sad state indeed, and its people wished the Romans back again. Having almost forgotten how to fight in their long years of peace, they sent to Rome to beg for help, but could get none.

Things were in this state when Arthur came to the throne. Where he reigned we cannot exactly say. Historians tell us that if there ever was an Arthur, he was a petty prince in South Wales. But this is a romance, and not a history, so we may believe that Lord Tennyson, who has told the story so beautifully, knows much more about it than historians, and from him we learnt that Arthur reigned in the South of England. He had a palace near London, perhaps at Westminster. He sometimes held his court at Winchester, which was then called Camelot, and sometimes at Caerleon on the Usk. His realm included Devonshire, which also had its own Prince, Sir Geraint, but not Cornwall, where the wicked King Mark reigned.

Now Arthur was very different from the kings who had gone before him. Where he came from no one knew but the great magicians Merlin and Bleys, and Merlin would not tell. Some said he was the son of the late king Uther, and some of a knight named Gorlois. Others said that Sir Anton, who had brought him up, was his father; and others told a stranger story still. It seems that Uther, who was a cruel tyrant, had no son, and wished to make a beautiful woman named Ygerne his wife. She was married to Gorlois, but Uther cared nothing for that. He made war on Gorlois, and slew him. Then he, besieged his castle, which was bravely defended by Ygerne. Well though her men fought for her, it was of no use. The castle was taken, and Uther forced Ygerne to marry him that very day. He did not live many months after this wicked deed, but died, mourning that he had no son to inherit his throne. That same night, it was said, Ygerne bore a son. Was it the son of Uther or of Gorlois? No one could say. In any case, the child was not safe in Ygerne's lonely castle, as some king or baron who wished for Uther's throne was sure to try to kill any child who was thought



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to be the rightful heir. So the wise Merlin took the child and gave it to Sir Anton to keep.

This was one story; but Bleys on his death-bed told another. He said that on the night of Uther's death Merlin had taken him to a cliff by the sea, and that close to the shore, tossed towards heaven on the crest of a mighty wave, they saw a ship, whose decks were crowded with people in shining white robes. Who they were or whence they came, Bleys did not know; but Merlin had been expecting them. The ship vanished, and they climbed down the rocks to the beach. There they counted nine waves break, and the ninth, which was bigger than all the rest, rushed up to their feet. Its white foam seemed to be on fire, and it bore with it a naked child. Him Merlin seized, crying, 'The King! Here is an heir for Uther.' The sea rushed around him as if it would carry him away; then, suddenly, grew calm.

This was a very strange story, but for my part I believe it was the true one; for when Merlin was asked about it, he laughed and would say nothing plainly; but he did say of the King, 'From the great deep to the great deep he goes.' And when we read presently how Arthur went to the great deep, we shall see that it quite agrees with the tale told by Bleys of how he came from it. Besides, Arthur was not like the Britons. They all had either black or red hair, and Arthur's was golden. Uther and Gorlois and Ygerne were all dark, but Arthur was fairer than any one ever seen in Britain.

But though we do not know who was Arthur's father, we know that Sir Anton brought him up; and excellent was the training he gave him. He taught him how to ride and fight, and made him the best soldier of his days. Merlin taught him much of his wisdom, but none of his magic, and made him the wisest and best of kings; and that he might learn to be kind and gentle as well as brave

and wise, he took him one day to see Bellicent, the daughter of Ygerne, and so, perhaps, Arthur's own sister. He found her in trouble, crying because she had been beaten for some fault of which she was not really guilty, and, though younger than herself, comforted her with his gentle words. They became playmates, and loved each other very dearly, and no doubt taught each other much that was good, till at last they were separated by her marriage with King Lot of Orkney.

Now when Arthur was almost a man, he was walking one day with Merlin beside a lake, when a strange thing happened. The arm of a lady, clad in white silk, and holding a sword in its hand, came up suddenly in the middle of the lake. Arthur, filled with surprise, got into a boat which lay by the bank, rowed out, and took the sword. Its hilt was covered with wonderful jewels, and on one side of the blade, which was dazzlingly bright, were engraved the words, 'Take me': on the other side, 'Cast me away.' Arthur was very sad when he saw the latter words, but Merlin said, 'Take thou and strike: the time to cast away is yet far off.' So Arthur took the sword and called it Excalibur, which meant 'The steel-cutter,' for no armour, however strong, could resist its terrible blows. With this sword he fought all his battles, always using it in the cause of right and justice.

Not long after this, there was a great feast at Camelot. Though it was so long since Uther's death, no king had succeeded him, and Merlin knew that the time had come to proclaim Arthur as his heir. Some of Uther's lords and barons protested, shouting that Arthur was not Uther's son, but all the better men sided with Merlin, and in the great cathedral Arthur was crowned. He called his friends to him and made them swear a great oath: to honour and obey the king; to love one lady and be true to her; to protect the weak; and to lead pure and holy

lives. Then he knighted them, and called them the Knights of the Round Table; for Merlin had made a great round table for them to sit at in Arthur's hall. The new knights rose from their knees, pale and trembling lest they should find their oath too hard to keep, but, as the King spoke noble words of comfort to them, it was noticed that for a while each looked like the King—good and noble and holy. And by the King stood three fair Queens, who, it was foretold, 'should help him at his need'; and the Lady of the Lake, who knew a deeper magic than Merlin's. Some say that the three Queens were Faith, Hope, and Love, and that the Lady of the Lake was Religion. Perhaps this was so, but in any case we are sure that it was by these virtues and through his religion that he ruled so well.

Arthur soon had a chance of testing the valour of his knights. King Leodogran of Cameliard sent him a pitiful account of how his land was being laid waste by the Saxons and by wild beasts. Children were carried off by wolves and wild dogs; bears and wild boars destroyed the crops; and the Saxons were slaying and burning without mercy. 'Arise and help us, thou!' he ended. 'For here, between men and beasts, we die.'

The King, who had as yet done no deed of arms, hastened to help his brother king. The people of Cameliard crowded into the street to see their new friends, and among them was Guinevere, Leodogran's daughter, the most beautiful of women. She did not notice Arthur, for he was armed like his knights, and indeed less grandly than many of them; but he saw her as he rode by and thought at once that she and no other must be his wife. He had no time then to attend to his own affairs. He had come to fight the Saxons, not to make love; so he rode on without a word. His knights were few but brave, and he led them well, remembering all he had learnt from Sir

Anton and Merlin ; and after some fierce battles he drove the Saxons back to their ships and their home. Then he arranged to hunt down the wild beasts, and, lest they should return, cut down the forests, and made good roads by which hunters and knights could travel to any part of the country where they were wanted.

This work was hardly done, and Arthur had not yet had time to woo Guinevere, when bad news came from home. The lords and barons who had protested against his coronation had risen against him.

‘Who is he, that he should rule us ?’ they exclaimed. ‘Who has proved him King Uther’s son ? We look at him, and find that neither face nor bearing, neither limbs nor voice, are like those of Uther. This is the son of Gorlois—the son of Anton.’

Then they sought the help of all the petty kings they could. Even King Lot came from far-away Orkney, though Bellicent must have pleaded hard that he would not fight against her dear Arthur.

So Arthur must leave Cameliard. ‘What is my throne-worth ?’ he said. ‘What happiness is it to reign a lonely king ? But were I mated with the fairest woman under heaven, we would reign indeed and make this dark land light.’ Yet he must fight, not because he wanted the throne for his own sake, but because it had been given him for the good of his people.

The sun was just rising when he met the enemy, and the two armies in glittering armour with pennons floating on their long lances, the crests of their helmets stirred by the spring breezes, and the many-coloured devices on their shields, must have been a glorious sight. Soon the signal was given to charge, and a terrible battle began. The King’s army was small, but all his new knights were determined to show that they were worthy to be knights, so each fought like ten men ! For a long time

it was doubtful which side would win. Sometimes one was driven back, sometimes the other; but wherever Arthur went with his terrible Excalibur the enemy fell before him. All day long the fight went on, but about sunset Arthur at the head of the whole Round Table charged down upon the foe, who turned and fled. The field was won. The barons scattered and went each to his own home: and never till the very end of Arthur's reign did they dare to fight him again.

Now at last Arthur had time to think of his own affairs. Unfortunately he could not be spared from court, so he sent the good, honest knight Sir Bedivere with two others to ask the hand of Guinevere in marriage. King Leodogran was grateful enough, but at the same time he was a cautious man. He did not know who Arthur was, so he asked questions of every one who he thought might know anything about the subject, before he would give any answer. First he asked his own Chamberlain, who told him none knew save Bleys and Merlin. Then he asked Sir Bedivere, who told him the story about Uther and Ygerne; and while he was still wondering what he should do, Bellicent with her two elder sons came to pay him a visit, so he began to question her. 'A disputed throne,' said he, 'is like an iceberg in the warm Atlantic. Has Arthur strength to hold his foemen down?'

She told him of the glorious scene at the coronation, and said that with his knights and Excalibur he must succeed. Leodogran was pleased to hear this, but still wanted to know about Arthur's parentage.

'You are the prince's sister?' he asked.

'I am daughter of Gorlois and Ygerne,' said she.

'And therefore Arthur's sister?' asked he again.

'These are secret things,' she said, and signed to her sons to go away. Gawain, who afterwards became a famous knight, rushed out singing, and dashed across

the fields, leaping every hedge and ditch he came to. But Modred had heard the word 'secret,' and stood outside the door to try to overhear his mother's words.

Then she told Leodogran how she and Arthur had been playmates, and of the tale that Bleys had told her on his death-bed, and how Merlin had sworn that though men might wound the King he would not die, but 'pass' and come again, and that he should subdue the Saxons and be owned as King by all men.

That night Leodogran dreamed that he saw a hill, and on the top of it a phantom king, half hidden by mist; and on the slopes men fought and houses burned, the fighters crying that the King was no son of Uther. Suddenly all this vanished and he saw Arthur stand in the skies crowned. So at last he was satisfied, and sending for Sir Bedivere bade him tell King Arthur that he would give him his daughter.

Then Arthur sent Sir Lancelot to bring his bride, and in the bright month of May he took her home. They rode ahead of their guard and servants and talked of sport and tilts and pleasure. The trees wore the bright green coats which English trees put on in spring, and the hawthorns were full of white blossoms. Hyacinths covered the ground so that the earth looked as blue as the heavens, and at noon and sunset they always found their tents pitched by some pleasant stream where the songs of birds made music while they ate their meal and rested. And Guinevere thought she had never met such a man as Sir Lancelot; and she was right, for he was the handsomest and most courteous, as well as the bravest and strongest, of all the Knights of the Round Table.

Alas, that Arthur could not go himself! Alas, that she had not learnt to know him at Cameliard! For when he came riding out of Camelot to meet her, a thought passed through her mind, 'Not like Sir Lancelot!' He seemed

to her more like a god than a man—not one to love and marry. But she said no word of this, and Arthur was glad, for he thought that she must be good as she was fair, and that now he had found the Queen who would help him in all his great designs.

So they were married amidst the rejoicings of all the Round Table. The great church was fragrant with incense: and when the Bishop had joined their hands and made them man and wife, he blessed them, bidding them reign well, love each other, and work together till they made their country far better than it was. And he prayed that the Queen might help the King in all things, and that the Knights of the Round Table might all work nobly to fulfil the King's purposes.

After the wedding, as they were feasting in Arthur's hall, some great lords from Rome came in and demanded that Arthur should send to Rome the usual yearly tribute. But Arthur pointed to his knights and said:

‘See, these have sworn to fight for me and honour me. Things are not as they were, and since you have grown too weak to drive the heathen from the walls of Rome, we will pay tribute no more.’

This was hardly what the lords expected. Defiance from an upstart like Arthur? They promised that they would soon be back with an army behind them, and that for every coin which he denied them they would have ten. And though the Romans could spare no men to help Britain against the Saxons, they managed to send some to get the tribute. But Arthur drove them back with loss, and tribute was never paid again.

His next task was to stop the quarrels and disorder in the country; and since he and his knights were all of one mind, they gradually made all the petty kings either subjects or allies, till Arthur was the overlord, not only of his own realm, but of all Britain.

When this was done, they turned their attention to the Saxons. For years these savage men had plundered the coasts of Britain as they pleased, killing the people like sheep. But now that they were united they were more like fierce lions than sheep: so the Saxons brought mighty armies across the sea and tried to over-run all Britain. But wherever they came, Arthur met them; and in twelve great battles he defeated them with such slaughter that at last they thought it better to stay at home or seek some easier prey, at least while Arthur ruled in Britain.

Now the people could find time to hunt down the bears and wolves; but many robbers remained—villains who lurked by the wayside to rob travellers, wicked barons who kept many armed followers in their castles and lived by plundering all the country round. From time to time complaints of such men came to Arthur, and he would go or send his knights to punish them; so that in time the nearer part of his realm was quiet and peaceful. But till the very end of his reign there were lawless knights and ruffians in the distant parts of Britain, so that there was plenty of work for the Knights of the Round Table. We must now tell of some of their adventures.

GERAINT AND ENID : PART I

KING ARTHUR, one Whitsuntide, was holding his court at Caerleon-upon-Usk. As he sat in his hall a forester appeared, telling him that he had seen a milk-white hart of great size, and, it being holiday time, Arthur said they would hunt the beast next day. Queen Guinevere asked if she might join them, and Arthur gladly consented. But the banquet lasted late that night, and when Guinevere awoke next morning it was long past sunrise. The King and his courtiers had started without her; so she dressed hastily, called a maid, and rode out with her to see what she might of the sport. She did not enter the wood, but stayed on a hill outside it. Presently a gay young knight came riding towards her, not dressed for the hunt, but wearing a purple scarf over his silken robes. She recognized him at once as Sir Geraint, Prince of Devon, and when he bowed and greeted her she playfully chid him for being later even than she.

‘Yes, noble Queen,’ said he. ‘I am so late that I have come like you only to watch the chase.’

‘Then stay with me,’ she replied, ‘for the deer often leave the wood at this spot.’

Geraint obeyed her, and, as they sat and listened for the hounds, three persons rode by. The first was a knight who had the visor (or front part of his helmet) raised, so that his face could be seen—a young and handsome face, but very proud. Beside him rode a lady, and they were followed by a dwarf. The Queen looked at them curiously, and, thinking it strange that

a knight whom she did not know should be there, sent her maid to ask the dwarf who he was.

The dwarf was an ill-tempered old fellow, and had learnt from his master to be proud, so he refused to give any information.

‘Then I will ask your master,’ said the maid.

‘No,’ said the dwarf, ‘I vow you shall not. You are not worthy to speak to him.’

She was urging her horse forward to pass him, when he struck at her with his whip, so that she gave up the attempt and, full of indignation, went back to the Queen to tell her what had happened.

Geraint then said that he would find out the knight’s name, but he fared no better than the maid, for the dwarf actually cut his face open with his whip. Geraint’s hand went to his sword, but he scorned to stain it with the blood of a wretched dwarf; so he turned back to the Queen and said that he would follow the three to their home. Then he would borrow or hire arms (for he carried none but his sword) and do combat with the knight and humble his pride; and if he were not slain in the fight, he would return on the third day.

This was not the first time that Geraint had served the Queen, and as she graciously bade him adieu, she said, ‘Prosper in this as you have always done. Some day you will meet a lady whom you will love. When that happens bring her to court, and even though she be a beggar maid I will give her a wedding dress which shall make her as glorious as the sun.’

So Sir Geraint rode on his way, angry with the stranger knight for his discourtesy, angry at the insult offered to himself by the wretched dwarf, and angry at having lost his morning’s pleasure. Far through the wood he followed the three, till the path took them into open country and up to the ridge of a hill. Thence he could see a little town

in the valley below. It consisted for the most part of one long street, on one side of which stood a fine new castle, and on the other a ruined one. And through the town flowed a stream, the sound of which he could hear as it splashed over its stony bed.

The three entered the newly-built fortress. Geraint, tired with his long ride, hoped to find rest at some inn ; but every inn was full. The town was very busy. Blacksmiths were shoeing horses, pages scouring their masters' armour, and no one seemed to have time even to look at the new comer. He asked a page what the bustle was about, and the only reply he got was, 'The Sparrow-hawk.' Then he asked an old man, who was carrying a sack of corn, and received the same reply. Next he asked an armourer who was mending a helmet ; and this man, without even turning round, said, 'Friend, he who serves the Sparrow-hawk has little time for idle questioners.' Geraint was getting angry, and exclaimed, 'May wrens and sparrows peck your Sparrow-hawk to death ! You think the idle gossip of your little town is the talk of the whole world. What care I for it ? Tell me where I can get lodging, and arms to fight my enemy.'

This startled the armourer, who, turning round and seeing that it was a knight in purple silk who spoke to him, said, 'Pardon me, sir stranger. There is to be a tournament to-morrow, and we have more work than we can do. Arms ? All the armour in this town is wanted, but perhaps you can get lodging at Earl Yniol's across the bridge.' He pointed to the ruined castle, and then fell to work once more.

Geraint turned his weary horse towards the ruin, crossed the bridge, and entered the castle yard. The gate was broken down. Weeds sprang up everywhere between the stones of the pavement. Looking up, he saw the remains of a spiral staircase which had once wound its way

up to a turret. Now the wall of the tower which had held it was broken down and lay in a heap below. Ivy had grown over the ruins in all directions, and everything looked waste and neglected. But in the court, perhaps called from the hall by the sound of the tread of Geraint's horse, stood an old man. His beard was long and grey, his face noble and cheerful; but his tall figure was somewhat bent with age. His dress, which had once been magnificent, was worn and patched. He asked Geraint what was his business, and when Geraint told him that he sought a lodging, Yniol replied:

'Though we have been rich and are now poor we are ever ready to receive guests; you will, however, be poorly entertained.'

'If you do not serve me sparrow-hawks for meat,' said Geraint, 'I shall be satisfied; for I have not eaten for twelve hours.'

'I have better cause than you to curse the Sparrow-hawk,' replied the Earl with a sigh. 'But come in; for, unless you wish it, we will not mention him even in jest.'

Then, as they crossed the court, Geraint heard a sweet voice coming from the hall—sweeter it seemed to him than that of any nightingale he had ever heard. The Queen's words, which had come to his mind from time to time during the day, returned to him now, and he thought, even before he saw the singer, 'If God help me, she who sings so sweetly shall be my wife.'

It was the voice of Enid, Yniol's daughter, which he heard, and she sang a brave song about Fortune and its changes; how the sun might shine or the storm blow, how riches might come or go, and yet man remains the master of his fate, if he have but a great heart.

As the song ended they climbed over a pile of fallen stones and entered the old hall. A fine room it had been

once; but it had been neglected for many months, and its carved rafters were covered with cobwebs. Two people were within, the beautiful, slender Enid, clad like her father in faded silk, and her mother, who was in like plight. Again Geraint thought, 'If God help me, this shall be my wife.' He said no word, and there was silence until Yniol spoke.

'Enid,' said he, 'take the good knight's horse to the stable and feed him, and then go to the town and buy us food. We will be as merry as we can. "Our hoard is little but our hearts are great."'

The last words came from Enid's song. As soon as he had given his commands, Enid stepped past them towards the door. Geraint hastened after her, thinking it discourteous to let a lady tend his horse; but Yniol cried:

'Stay, my son. We are poor, but our guests must not act as their own servants.'

Then Geraint stood where he was, since courtesy would not let him break the courteous rule of the house. So Enid led his horse to the stable and gave it food, and then crossed the bridge to the town, and returned with a youth behind her. Between them they brought what was wanted for supper, and, since the kitchen was in ruins, Enid cooked the supper in the hall, and then waited on them as they ate it. And ever as Geraint saw how patiently she worked and how graceful she was in all she did, he wondered more and more, and was more determined than ever that Enid should be his bride.

When supper was over, Geraint turned to Yniol and said: 'Sir Earl, who is this Sparrow-hawk? Yet tell me not his name, for I have sworn to have that from his own lips, if he is the knight whom I saw ride into that new fortress. I am Geraint of Devon. This morning I was with the Queen, and she sent her maid to ask his name. The knight's dwarf, a vicious creature, struck at her with

his whip, and I vowed to avenge that insult and make the knight himself tell me his name. I followed him unarmed, hoping to procure arms to fight him, but the people of your town have all gone mad, and I can hear of none. They talk but of the Sparrow-hawk. They think the idle gossip of their little town the talk of the whole world. If you, sir, can tell me where I can get arms, I will break his pride and avenge the insult done the Queen.'

'Are you the famous Geraint?' said Yniol. 'I was sure you were a noted knight as soon as I saw you; and I might have guessed that you belong to the Round Table. I am not merely flattering when I call you famous: ask my dear daughter here, who has often heard me speak of your great deeds, and has loved to hear of them. She has seen little enough of noble knights. The two whom she has known are base indeed. First came the drunken Limours—drunk even when he wooed her and sought to make her his wife. He may be dead, for the last I heard of him was that he had gone to the wild land of Cornwall beyond your Devon. Then this Sparrow-hawk, my nephew, sought her hand. I, knowing his fierce, wild nature, denied him, and this made him both proud and angry. He spread a report that I had robbed him of money left by his father, and so injured my name. Then he bribed my servants and the people of my town to rise against me. So, three years ago, the night before my Enid's birthday, they sacked my castle and took my earldom from me. My nephew built yonder fort to terrify any who would help me, but left me to live in this old ruin. He would probably kill me if he did not despise me. Sometimes I despise myself for living on here when I have lost my greatness. I was too gentle to use my power when I had it, and now that it is gone I know not whether I am base or manly, foolish or wise; but I do know that I can bear patiently any ill that may befall me.'

'That is a noble spirit,' said Geraint; 'but where can I get arms for to-morrow's tournament?'

'As for arms,' said Yniol, 'I can lend you mine, though they are old and rusty. But you cannot fight to-morrow. It is the rule of the tournament that no man shall fight unless the lady he loves best be present. A golden sparrow-hawk sitting on a silver wand is given as a prize for the fairest lady there, and the knight who wins it gives it to his lady-love. Now my nephew brings a lady to the lists—you saw him with her yesterday—and, being large-boned and skilful at tilting, he has overthrown every one who has dared to fight him. He has twice gained the prize for her and so won himself the name of Sparrow-hawk.'

We know what Geraint had been thinking about ever since he heard Enid's voice. Now he felt the time had come to speak.

'Sir,' he said, 'let me fight for your dear child. Never have I seen so fair a maid. If I fall, her good name will not suffer; and if I live, I vow that I will marry her.'

Yniol was delighted with the offer, not only for his daughter's sake but for his own. The father-in-law of the Prince of Devon would never be allowed to live on in an old ruined castle, scorned by all around. But his first thought was for Enid's happiness. He looked for her, but she had slipped out of the room as soon as she heard her own name: so he called his wife and bade her go and see what her child thought.

She followed Enid to her room, and putting a hand on each of her shoulders, gazed into her face while she told her of all the talk in the hall. Blushes came and went on Enid's cheeks, and her head slowly sank forwards. She admired Geraint for his person as well as for his great deeds, and thought it would be a fine thing to marry such a man, but modesty prevented her from saying a single word. She went to bed, but not to sleep, wondering how

so great a knight could care for such a simple girl as she. But next morning, still without a word from her, she and her mother went down to the lists, waiting till Yniol and Geraint should join them.

This then was her answer ; and when Geraint saw her there he felt that he could fight for her against a thousand men. He was wearing Yniol's rusty old armour, yet looked a noble figure as he sat upon his horse. Other knights came, and the galleries around the lists were crowded with people from all the country-side. Then the prize was set up, and Yniol's nephew turned to the lady at his side and bade her take it, for she was the fairest there.

'Not so,' cried Geraint, 'there is a worthier.'

The knight turned round, and now saw Yniol and his wife and daughter for the first time. He was filled with rage against them, and against Geraint, who had taken their part.

'Do battle for it then,' he cried.

They withdrew to opposite ends of the lists, and, at a given signal, dashed at each other. The Sparrow-hawk struck Geraint full in the middle of the shield and made him reel in his saddle. Geraint aimed at, and struck, his enemy's helmet, but the helmet was firmly riveted to his body-armour and the rivets held. He was forced backward, but kept his seat. A second time they charged, and with such force that the strong shafts of their lances were splintered, and both horses forced on to their haunches. Neither had as yet gained any advantage, and each resolved that the third charge should settle the matter. They tried to spur their horses on to greater speed than ever, but the poor beasts were weary after two such terrible shocks, and both knights easily kept their seats. Now they saw that to go on fighting in this way was useless, so they dismounted and drew their swords ; and as they fought, amidst the clatter of steel they could faintly hear



AT A GIVEN SIGNAL, DASHED AT EACH OTHER

applause from the galleries around. They struck such mighty blows that it was a wonder that even their armour protected them. At last, weary, dizzy, bruised, and dripping with sweat, they were forced to pause, but only for a rest. As soon as they had recovered their breath they were both at it again, until they could scarcely strike for weariness, and rested a second time. Neither thought of yielding, and presently they approached each other once more, each seeking some chance to strike a fatal blow, but neither willing to begin till he saw such a chance. Then Yniol cried aloud, 'Remember that great insult done the Queen,' and anger made Geraint forget how tired he was. He heaved up his sword and brought it down on the other's helmet with such force that he split the helmet and cut into the skull. The Sparrow-hawk fell, and Geraint, putting a foot on his body, said, 'Thy name?' The fallen man groaned out, 'Edyrn, son of Nudd. I am ashamed to tell it thee, but my pride is broken, for men have seen me fall.'

Then said Geraint, 'Edyrn, son of Nudd, you shall do two things or you shall die. First you shall ride with your lady and your page to Arthur's court, beg pardon of the Queen, and accept any punishment she may impose on you. Secondly, you shall restore his earldom to your uncle Yniol.'

'I will do these things,' said Edyrn. 'My pride is gone since Enid has seen me overthrown.'

And so, as soon as he had recovered from his wound, he did as he had promised, and Guinevere forgave him. He had been taught a lesson and made up his mind to lead a better life. In time, King Arthur admitted him to the Round Table, and he remained a good and faithful knight till he fell fighting for the King in his last great battle, of which we shall presently have to tell.

Notice was sent through the town that Yniol was Earl

again, and that all that had been stolen from his castle, three years before, should be sent back to him. So some for fear restored their spoils. Others, who loved him, had carefully kept such of his goods as they could get, hoping for such a day as this, and now gladly brought them back, so that many a precious thing was piled up in the hall.

Geraint now begged that he might take Enid with him to court next day. She wished for some delay, but he seemed so anxious to go that she thought it would be ungrateful to refuse, and at last consented. He gave no reason, but perhaps you will remember that he had promised the Queen to return on the third day if he were still alive.

Next morning Enid woke and looked at her faded gown. It had never seemed so threadbare before. Must she wear this to go to court? If he would but have waited a few days she would have worked so hard and made herself such a fine dress! Then she would have brought no disgrace on him, but now—— And then she began to think how, three years before, the night before her birthday, her mother had brought her a lovely dress which she was to wear next day; and how that very night Edyrn's men had come, and the dress, like all their other beautiful things, had been carried off. There used to be a pond near their castle in which were beautiful gold-fish, and amongst them one of a dull brown hue. She would be like that brown fish when she got to court. And as she thought of this she fell asleep again and dreamt that she was such a brown fish swimming in a pond among many gold ones; but this pond was in a garden of Arthur's. Some children came by and called to the gardeners to pull the ugly brown fish from the pond and let it die. Then some one seized her and she awoke, and lo! it was her mother who had brought the very dress she had been longing for. It had never been worn, and looked as fresh as when it was new.

Her mother told her a long story about how it had been recovered, and they both rejoiced that she could now be dressed in a manner fitting for a prince's bride. And then the good mother helped to dress her, and when she had done, praised her beauty, saying that she was fairer than the bride of Cassivelaun, whose fair face, she said, had first brought Julius Cæsar to Britain.

Meantime Geraint, who had slept in the hall, awoke, and told Yniol that it was time to start. Yniol told him that Enid's mother was dressing her in robes fit for a princess, and Geraint replied :

'Earl, beg her for the sake of my love to ride with me in her faded silk.'

Yniol took the message. Enid was grieved, and dared not look in her mother's face lest she should weep in her disappointment. But, ready to obey the least command of Geraint, even though she could not understand it, she laid aside the new dress, put on the old silk once more, and went down to the hall.

Geraint looked up as she entered, delighted to find that she had yielded to his wish, and then seeing a look of sadness on her mother's face, took her by the hand and said :

'My new mother, be not vexed with me. As I left Caerleon, the Queen promised me that if I ever brought my bride to her she would clothe her like the sun ; and as soon as I saw your dear daughter I vowed that, if I could win her, the Queen and no other should make your Enid burst like the sun from a cloud. I thought that this service might make them friends ; and how can Enid find a nobler friend ? Again, I wondered whether Enid really loved me ; or was moved merely by gratitude, or by my fame, and the contrast between my fine clothes and this dusky hall. So, to test her love, I asked her to do this hard thing—to lay aside the dress such as she used to wear

but has had to do without for these three years. But now I am sure she loves me and that neither of us can ever mistrust the other. She shall wear your fine dress on some great festival when we come to visit you.'

Enid shed a few tears as she embraced her parents: but she soon wiped them away as she rode off with her new lord. And when they reached Caerleon, Guinevere welcomed them gladly and kept her word, so that never did the great church see a more lovely or a grander bride.

GERAINT AND ENID: PART II

ALL that summer and through the following winter Geraint remained at court. The Queen and Enid became great friends, as he had hoped they would. The Queen first loved her for Geraint's sake, but soon learnt to love her even more dearly for her own. Next to Guinevere, Enid was the fairest lady in the court. As Geraint grew to know her better he ever loved her more fondly, and was never tired of giving her new silks and satins. At times the Queen herself would dress her with her own hands, and Geraint was delighted to see such friendship between the two noblest ladies in the land.

But Guinevere was not so noble as he thought. The King had married her because he thought her mind must be as grand and lovely as her face, and that she would help him in all his great plans for the good of the realm; but we have seen how at her first sight of him she was disappointed. She admired him, but could not love him; and he, taken up with his kingly cares, seemed cold to her. He thought she loved him as fondly as he loved her, but she never ceased to wish that it had been her fate to marry Lancelot. And now rumours spread through the court that Guinevere cared nothing for the King; and Geraint heard them, and, as time went on, came to believe them.

'Now,' thought he, 'how can I let my wife be always with the Queen? If she does not love Arthur she may teach Enid not to care for me.' So he went to the King and said:

‘ Sir King, beyond my land of Devon lies a wilderness full of thieves and robbers, great and small. If any man has done wrong and fears justice he flees thither. You have work to do elsewhere : so, till you can come yourself and cleanse the land as you did Cameliard, and as you have done many other regions since, let me go and do what I can myself.’

The King thought awhile, and then gave him leave. So Geraint took his wife and fifty knights whom he had brought to court to serve the King, and one bright spring morning marched with them to his own land.

But when he got home he forgot all about his promise to the King. He took no steps to clear his principedom of evil-doers. He did not keep his knights in practice by holding tournaments. He did not even hunt or hawk. The fear that Enid might love him less had so taken hold of him that he forgot everything but her, and spent all his time in trying to please her. But this was not what she wanted ; she was quite unlike the Queen, and hated that he should neglect his duties even for her sake. Presently his people began to talk of his weakness. ‘ We had a noble Prince,’ they said, ‘ but now that he is married he cares for nothing but his fair wife.’ They said no word of this to Enid, but her waiting-women praised him to her for being so devoted to her, and this vexed her yet more. She longed to tell Geraint what she felt, but was too bashful ; and when he saw a look of sadness on her face he could not guess the real cause, but thought that she had learnt from Guinevere not to love him. Perhaps she loved some other man better than him. And so these two, each loving the other more than anything on earth, for want of a little plain speaking grew more and more unhappy.

At last one summer morning, a little more than a year after their marriage, the bright sun shining in her face wakened Enid. She sat up, and, looking at her sleeping

husband, admired his great muscles and splendid form, and talked half aloud, saying to him :

‘Am I the cause that men despise you ? Indeed I am, because I am afraid to speak and tell you what men say. Your name is dearer to me than even your life. I would rather see you ride into the battle fighting for the right and die, I would rather die myself, than that you should be shamed through me. If then I am bold enough to see my dear husband fall, why can I not tell him that men say that he is more like a woman than a man ? I fear that I am no true wife.’

A hot tear falling on his hand awoke him, and by great ill-luck he heard some of her last words—thought it was she who charged him with loss of manliness, and heard the last sentence but too plainly.

‘What !’ thought he. ‘Are all my pains in vain ? Is she now weeping for some gay knight in Arthur’s hall ?’

Had he had courage to speak, all might have gone well : but he could not look at her sweet face and charge her with thinking or feeling anything that a good wife should not. Yet he must do something. He would at least show her that he was a man and no woman. So he called to his squire for horses and arms, and bade Enid put on her worst dress and follow him.

‘If Enid errs, may Enid know her fault ?’ she asked in surprise.

‘Ask not, but obey,’ said he harshly.

Then Enid remembered the old silk dress in which he saw her first. She had kept it to remind her of her first meeting with him, and now she put it on once more.

They mounted, and fearing that if she rode by him he would say cruel words which would hurt her terribly, he ordered her to ride far before him and never say a word to him whatever happened. Then he exclaimed, ‘Though I am less man than woman, I will fight with iron, not with

gold,' and threw his purse from him. And Enid, turning, saw all the steps of her home strewn with gold and silver coins. Once more he cried, 'To the wilds,' and Enid led the way.

Sadly they rode through the desert amidst swamps and pools, along little-trodden paths where robbers had their haunts; he thinking ever how good he had been to her and how bad a return she had made, and she wondering what fault she could have committed without knowing it, and wishing that he would tell her what it was so that she might make amends.

It was now nine o'clock in the morning, and they were approaching some rocks. Enid, who was far ahead, saw three knights behind them, but they were hidden from Geraint.

'Look!' she heard one say. 'Here comes a cowardly-looking fellow, hanging his head down and looking like a beaten cur. We will slay him and take his horse and armour and his damsel.'

Enid thought a moment. Should she obey her lord, or go and warn him? It would be better to be slain by him in his anger than to see him slain by these three villains; so she went back and told him what she had heard.

Now the great Sir Geraint was behaving more like a sulky boy than a noble prince; so instead of thanking her for her warning he only blamed her for speaking. Then, thinking of the words he had overheard, he said: 'Whether you care for my life or long for my death, you shall see that I have lost none of my vigour.' And in this he only spoke the truth.

The three knights came charging down upon him together. Geraint aimed at the middle one, who was a trifle ahead of the others, and his good spear pierced right through the robber-knight's breast, and stood out a foot behind his back. The others both struck Geraint, but their spears

snapped like sticks of sealing-wax, and Geraint, striking with his sword first to right and then to left, felled them to the ground. Then, dismounting, he stripped the three villains of their armour and bound it on their horses. Next he knotted the reins together and told Enid to drive them before her.

He followed nearer to her now, and, seeing the trouble she had in managing the horses, began to pity her. He wished to speak and tell her what he had heard, but, thinking of all her goodness and purity, he could not bring himself to accuse her of any evil thought or word. Yet he had heard with his own ears. What did she mean by saying she was no true wife? And thinking over this he tortured himself as they rode on till once again Enid saw three men, one bigger even than Geraint, who were lurking in a wood.

‘Look!’ cried one. ‘Three horses and three fine suits of armour, and all in charge of a girl.’

‘No,’ said the second. ‘There is a knight coming after her.’

‘He is a coward,’ said the third: ‘see how he hangs his head.’

‘Only one?’ said the giant. ‘Wait till he comes here, and fall upon him.’

So Enid said within herself, ‘I must disobey him for his own good. Let him slay me if he will.’ And, waiting till he came near, she asked timidly, ‘Have I leave to speak?’

‘You take it by speaking,’ he replied.

Then she told him what she had seen and heard, and once more he replied angrily that he would rather meet a hundred men, all larger than himself, than have her disobey him.

So Enid rode a little to one side, praying for his safety. The giant charged first and aimed at Geraint’s helmet, but missed it. Geraint’s lance was a little weakened by

the last fight, yet, before breaking, pierced the bandit's breast, who rolled off his horse. The other two were coming on more slowly, and when they saw this great fellow defeated they advanced more warily still. Geraint rode at them, and to frighten them more shouted his terrible battle-cry. Hearing this, they turned to flee; but they were not quick enough. Geraint caught them up and smote them from their horses one after the other. Once more he stripped his fallen foes of their armour and dealt with it as before.

Poor Enid had now six horses to drive, and the trouble of it gave her so much to think of that it almost drove her sorrow out of her mind for the time; but she obeyed patiently and uttered no word of complaint.

They went on through the wood, and at noon reached the open country beyond. They had left the waste land behind them and now came to a green meadow where men were mowing. Beyond this meadow rose a hill on which stood a little town and a castle, and down the rocky path from the castle came a boy bearing the mowers' mid-day meal. Geraint, seeing Enid look so pale, was sorry for her, and stopped the boy, saying: 'Boy, let the damsel eat; she is very faint.' 'Yes,' said the boy, 'and do you eat also, my lord, though the food is poor and only fit for mowers.'

So they sat down for a meal. Enid was too sad to take much food, but made a show of eating to please Geraint. But he was so hungry, after his long ride and his fights, that he ate all the food without noticing what he was doing. Then, finding the vessels empty, he exclaimed:

'Boy, I have eaten all. But take a horse and arms in return.'

'But,' said the boy, 'that would pay for fifty such meals!'

'So much the better for you,' said Geraint.

‘Then,’ replied the boy, ‘I take it as a gift. As for the food, I can easily get more for the mowers of our Earl. I am his servant, and will tell him what a great man has come here, and he will give you a better banquet than this.’

‘I need no better fare,’ said Geraint. ‘I never ate with better appetite. As for earls’ palaces, I need none. If you will hire a room for us in the town, and a stable for our horses, I will wait here till you return with fresh provisions.’

‘I will do so, my lord,’ said the boy, and walked off, delighted to possess a horse and arms of his own, and thinking himself almost a knight.

The boy had gone, and as he disappeared Geraint looked sideways at Enid, and thinking of his old saying that no mistrust should ever come between them, looked at the mowers, partly in pity, partly in amusement, at the loss of their dinner, and fell half-asleep. Enid sat thinking of the happy days she used to spend with her parents, before this dear husband—now so full of whims—had taken her away, and she twisted blades of grass about her wedding ring until the boy returned and told them where they could find a lodging. Then they went up to the town, and Geraint told her she might call for the woman of the house if she pleased, for which she meekly thanked him, and then sat down by the window: and he, surly knight, went to the far end of the room. And thus they sat without a word.

Suddenly there was a noise of many footsteps in the street and of people talking and laughing loudly. The boy had kept his word, and told the Earl of Geraint’s coming, and, since Geraint would not go to his castle, he had come to see Geraint, bringing with him his gay courtiers, many of whom had been drinking. It was no other than Limours, who had courted Enid in days gone by; and he was no less drunken and worthless now than he had been

then. He was graceful, however, and witty, and very fond of society; so, though he had never seen Geraint, but only heard of him, he now came with a group of wild friends to make his acquaintance.

Geraint, ever hospitable, called his host and said: 'Bring food and drink—the best you can. I will bear the cost.' So food was brought and they sat down to a banquet, Enid still keeping at the far end of the room. Limours jested and told merry stories, keeping every one—even the Prince—amused. And at last, for he had noticed Enid as soon as he entered the room, he asked Geraint's permission to speak to the damsel who seemed so lonely. 'Certainly,' said Geraint. 'Get her to speak. She does not speak to me.' So Limours arose, wondering whether he was sober enough to walk straight, and carefully guided his unsteady steps to where she sat.

'Enid!' he half whispered. 'You know I always loved you, and that the loss of you has made me the wild fellow I am. You are in my power now, but fear me not. When I wooed you of old I thought you would have accepted me but for your father. Now you are married to that proud fellow who cares nothing for you. He brings you here without a single attendant, and makes you ridiculous to all. He would never do this if he cared for you. He will never love you again, for he is tired of you. But I love you. Come and live with me in my castle and I will shut him up in a dungeon, and we will be happy together.'

Enid feared this half-drunken man. If she refused to do as he asked he might murder her husband, all unarmed as he was, and carry her off by force; so she answered cunningly:

'Earl, if you love me as you say, leave me for this night, for I am very weary. In the morning come and take me as if by force.'

So the Earl went home, bidding the Prince good-night as if he were his best friend, and then bragging to his followers that he was the only man whom Enid had ever cared for.

But Enid, left alone, once more asked herself what she should do. She must again break her lord's command or leave him to be taken unawares. He slept soundly enough, but her trouble kept sleep from her eyes. Now she would bend over him and rejoice that he had not been wounded ; then she would collect his arms and put them where he could best get them in case of sudden need. At last she dozed in her chair, but was suddenly wakened by a horrid dream. A cock crowing just before dawn startled her, and for an instant she thought the sound was the trumpet of Limours who had come to bear her off ; but he was sleeping off his drunkenness, and not likely to be there till long after sunrise. Once more she stole across the room to look at Geraint, and by accident she touched his helmet, which fell clattering to the ground and woke him.

She must speak. She told him how Limours had made love to her and how she had tricked him ; and then so sweetly and humbly begged his pardon for her disobedience that he could not chide her for it. He only groaned, saying : ' Your sweet faces make good fellows fools and traitors '—as if Limours could be called good—and then bade her tell the host to let them have their horses. So she went and roused the host and then came back, and, unbidden, helped Geraint to put on his armour. Then they went forth, and Geraint, without waiting to be told his debt, bade the host pay himself by keeping the remaining five horses and suits of armour.

' My lord, I have scarcely spent the worth of one,' he exclaimed.

' You will be all the wealthier,' said Geraint, and then, turning to Enid, he added, ' Forward ! and to-day, what-

ever you see or hear, I charge you speak not to me—though it is not of much use for me to charge you.’

‘My lord, I know your wish and would obey,’ said Enid meekly; ‘but going on before I see dangers which you cannot, and it is hard not to warn you. But I will try to be obedient.’

‘Do so,’ he said. ‘I am no fool. I have eyes, and ears which can hear you even in my dreams.’ And then he gazed at her to see if she understood what he was hinting at; and when she blushed because of his steady stare he took this for a sign of her guilt.

A broad road led from the town to the lands of a cruel earl named Doorm, called by his vassals ‘the Bull’ because of his great strength and fierceness. This road they followed, Geraint so much nearer to Enid than yesterday, that she felt much happier; until, on her glancing back, he angrily waved her a sign not to watch him, when all her sadness returned.

Before the dew was dry on the grass she heard the sound of many horses galloping after them, and, turning round, saw that he did not seem to notice it. She could see a cloud of dust, and lances shining through it; and, not to disobey him, pointed to the dust without a word. The foolish, obstinate Prince was pleased at this (though the difference between pointing and saying ‘Look’ is hard to find), so he turned round, and only just in time.

For in front of the others, on a great black horse which was almost beyond his control, came Limours. He dashed at Geraint, who charged and threw him far beyond his horse’s tail, where he lay stunned. Then he made for the next man—one more skilful with the lance than Limours. Him also he overthrew. Sometimes you may see a shoal of fish in a clear stream, the shadow of each cast on the sand beneath it by the bright sunlight. But if you raise a hand or move a limb, suddenly they are gone:

not a fish remains. So was it with Limours' followers. Seeing the fate of their two leaders, and the terrible Geraint making for them, they turned tail and fled; and in a few minutes even the beat of their horse-hoofs died away. They were but holiday friends, and left Limours unavenged, to get home as best he might. Even the horses of the two fallen men rushed after the flyers.

'What!' said Geraint, 'are horse and man alike untrue friends? I have been honest till now, and paid with arms and horses. I cannot beg or steal; shall we strip your love of his armour and put it on your horse, or go without our dinner?' Then, as she shook her head, 'I must not strip him? Pray then that we may meet Earl Doorm's horsemen, for you are honest, and I would like to be so too.'

She answered never a word, but led the way. But Geraint had not noticed in the excitement of the fight that the lance of his second foe had pierced his breast. The wound was bleeding underneath his armour, and, gradually, without realizing what was the matter, he grew faint. The country round swam before his eyes and became dark. And as his horse turned a sharp corner of the road he fell from the saddle, crashing down upon a soft, grassy bank.

Enid, startled by the sound, turned, and was horrified to see the brave war-horse standing with an empty saddle beside her fallen lord. She was alone and defenceless in a wild land, but no thought of her own danger crossed her mind. She turned and hastened to Geraint, unfastened his armour as quickly as her delicate hands could do such rough work, discovered the wound, and bound it up with her own silk veil, leaving her head bare in the burning sunshine. Then, when she had done all she could for him, she sat down beside him and wept.

What help could she hope for? In that lawless country

it was common enough to see dead men by the roadside, and if a woman happened to be weeping by the murdered man, who cared ? If people thought of the matter at all, they would only think that it was some one against whom Earl Doorm had had a grudge : and that would make them careful not to lend a helping hand lest they should draw down his wrath on them too. First a messenger of Doorm's went by, singing as he rode. Then came a man in a great hurry, galloping as fast as his horse could carry him, for Doorm had threatened to slay him. This frightened Enid's horse, which ran into a neighbouring wood and was seen no more. But Geraint's own horse stood still as if grieving for his master.

Many more went by, but none looked at Enid, till at noon came Earl Doorm with a hundred men, bent on plundering some weaker neighbour. He was a big, burly man, with a broad face and red hair, and a voice deep as a bull's.

'What, is he dead ?' he bellowed forth.

'No, no,' she cried. 'I am sure he is not dead. Will some of your kind people bear him out of this cruel sunshine ?'

'Well then,' said Doorm brutally, 'what are you crying about if he isn't dead ? And if he is, you're a fool to cry, since that won't bring him back to life. Whether he is alive or dead, you're only spoiling your pretty face by crying.' Then, turning to two of his men, he added, 'Yet since she is a pretty girl, carry him to the castle. If he gets well he can join us, and if not we can bury him. Mind you take the horse too, for it's a good one.'

So these two men raised him, grumbling as they did so, for they cared nothing for the wounded stranger, but much for the plunder they had hoped to get that day. They laid him on a litter which they had brought to carry home any of their own men who might be wounded, and by him

laid his sword and helmet. The horse followed without being led, and Enid walked beside; and so they came to the castle of Doorm. They laid the litter down in the hall, and then hurried off, grumbling at Doorm who had sent them back; at their comrades, who had been luckier than they; at Geraint, who had caused all the trouble; and at Enid too. But she cared nothing for their grumbling or abuse. She had no thought but for Geraint, by whom she sat all the long afternoon, bathing his forehead, rubbing his hands, and weeping.

At last he wakened from his swoon and found her shedding hot tears, which fell upon his face. 'She weeps for me,' said he to himself; and one would have thought he would have spoken to her. But no, he did not fully trust her yet, and was determined to test whether her tears were really for him or no; so he lay as if dead, and left his poor wife to bear her grief yet longer.

Towards evening Doorm and his followers returned, very hungry after their ride and fight. Each man cast down the plunder he had won, laid aside lance and helm, and sat down, calling loudly for food and drink. Whole hogs and quarter-oxen were brought in, and the fierce spearmen tore the food to pieces and devoured it, more like wolves than civilized men, and the hall was filled with the smell of the meat and the loud noise of a hundred men talking all at once. But Enid, filled with sorrow for Geraint, noticed nothing of all this.

Presently Doorm had eaten as much as he wanted, and began to look around the hall. His eyes fell on Enid, whom he had forgotten, and he saw how pale she was and how she was weeping still. So he called fiercely to her:

'Eat! I have never seen so pale a face as yours. Stop that crying: I cannot bear to see it. Your husband was a lucky man, for no one would cry if I were dead. Madam, were there more colour in your cheek, not a lady in my

castle could be compared to you for beauty. Come, I have never been married hitherto, but I will make you my countess.'

'I pray you let me alone, seeing how ill my husband is,' said Enid; but she spoke so low that Doorm thought she was consenting to what he said, and went on:

'Yes, eat and be glad, for you shall be my bride.'

'How should I be glad,' said Enid, 'unless my husband recovers?'

Then the Earl grew angry, seized her, and dragged her to the table, saying, 'Eat!'

'No, no,' said Enid; 'I will not eat till my husband eats with me.'

'Drink then,' said Doorm. 'I often cannot eat till I have drunk,' and he tried to force a horn of wine upon her.

'No!' said Enid once more. 'Not till my husband bids me drink and drinks with me. And should he die I will eat and drink no more.'

Now Doorm grew very angry. 'What!' said he, 'do you scorn me and my courtesy? I take care that every one shall obey me. Your husband is dead: mourn for him no more. Even when living he cared nothing for you, or he would not have let you wear that faded silk. At least put that off and wear this splendid robe.' And he signed to some women to bring a dress from one of the piles of plunder.

But Enid once more said, 'I was wearing this gown when he first saw me; in it I rode with him to court; in it he bade me clothe myself when we set forth on this fatal journey; and now I will not put it off till he bids me do so. I have trouble enough without being troubled by you; I can never love any but him; and so once more I pray you, if you are a gentleman, let me be.'

Doorm strode up and down the hall, biting his great red beard with rage, and then, coming up to Enid, cried,

‘It is just as easy to be rude to you as to be courteous. Thus I salute you’; and saying so he struck her on the cheek.

Enid now felt how helpless she was. She thought that Doorm must know that Geraint was dead or he would not dare to insult her thus, and, thinking herself utterly in the power of the brutal Earl, she gave such a cry as a wild animal caught in a trap gives when it sees the trapper coming. Geraint heard it. In an instant he was on his feet, sword in hand. In another, Doorm’s head was rolling on the floor.

Then arose a mighty noise. The spearmen and all others in the hall had been looking on. They all thought Geraint dead; and to see their lord beheaded by a dead man seemed a miracle. Shouting, yelling, and tumbling over each other in their fear, they fled out of the hall, and left Geraint and Enid alone.

And now Geraint was ashamed of himself: and indeed he had good cause to be; but let us honour him, since he was not too proud to own that he was in the wrong.

‘Enid,’ said he, ‘I have used you worse than that dead man. We have both suffered, but I have learnt from my sufferings, and will never doubt you again. I will punish myself for my doubts thus: Yesterday, when you thought me asleep, you said that you were no true wife—my own ears heard you—and now I swear that I will never ask what you meant, and will never doubt you again.’

But Enid could not realize that all her troubles were over, or feel glad at once. ‘Fly,’ she said, ‘before they come back and kill you. Your horse is outside: mine has run away.’

‘Then you must ride behind me,’ he replied.

So they passed from the hall, and the horse trotted up to them, neighing with joy at seeing its master on his feet once more. Enid kissed the white star on the horse’s fore-



THEY RODE AWAY, HAPPIER THAN THEY HAD EVER
BEEN BEFORE

head, and Geraint kissed Enid as he helped her to mount behind him ; and then she cast her arms about him and they rode away, happier than ever they had been before, since the trouble between them was at an end and each was sure of the other's love.

They crossed the castle court and were about to pass through the gate, when they saw that it was blocked by a knight, whose lance was levelled at them. Enid, knowing how weak her husband must be from loss of blood, cried aloud in terror, 'Slay not one half-dead !'

'That is the voice of Enid,' said the knight ; and now she saw that he was Edyrn, son of Nudd, and cried again, 'He spared your life. Do not take his.'

'Take Geraint's life ?' said he. 'No, Enid. I took him for a knight of Doorm. I love and honour your husband. I was lifted up so high with pride that I was half-way down the slope of Hell. Then he overthrew me, and so raised me higher than I had ever been before ; and now I am one of the Round Table. The King is near at hand, and, since I once knew Doorm, he has sent me on to bid him disband his forces and yield himself to the King.'

'He has appeared before a greater King than Arthur,' said Geraint. 'And there are his forces,' he added, pointing to the men and women scattered over the fields, and looking back fearfully towards the castle. And then he told Edyrn how he had beheaded Doorm, and something of the last two days' adventures. Edyrn begged him to go with him to the King and tell his tale, but Geraint was ashamed to go, and hesitated, till Edyrn said, 'If you will not go to him, he will come to you.' Then he consented to go.

As they rode, Edyrn told them more about himself ; how when Yniol refused him Enid's hand he plotted to overthrow his uncle ; how he would have slain him and

seized on Enid but for another plan, which was to fight in the Sparrow-hawk jousts until Enid should come there with her lover, whom he had determined to slay before Enid's eyes; how that lover had come and defeated him, and so broken down his pride. Then he said he had gone to court, hating the life Geraint had spared, and determined to die; but finding that none scorned him there, and that the only penance which Guinevere imposed on him was to stay at court awhile, and that all there seemed courteous and noble, he grew to hate his former life, and was now a changed man. He had seen Enid often, but would not speak to her till he was sure he was changed.

Enid believed him; and when he had done his tale they found themselves at Arthur's camp. The King greeted them, but asked them no questions. Instead, he led Edyrn aside and learnt what he knew. Then, helping Enid from her horse, he led her to a tent, and turning to Geraint he said:

'Prince, when you asked my leave to come and clear this land of robbers my conscience pricked me. I have left too much of my duty to my servants, and now am come myself, with Edyrn and others, to cleanse this wild land of wrong-doers. Have you looked at Edyrn? Do you see how he is changed? People will not believe that men repent; and often they are right, for to turn from one's evil practices is hard indeed. But Edyrn has cleared his heart of its evil passions, as I will clear this land of oppressors. I have admitted him to the Round Table, and he is now one of the best of our knights; which seems to me a greater thing than to attack a realm of robbers single-handed, to slay them one by one, and to be wounded nearly to death in doing so.'

Geraint felt the justice of the King's mild reproof, and that what he had done was neither wise nor wonderful. He went to Enid's tent, and the King sent him his own

doctor, and Enid gently nursed him back to health. And all her tender care of him made him love her more and more.

Meantime the King made a journey through all his realm, and inquired about the conduct of his officers, removing those who were idle or unjust.

Presently Geraint was strong enough to travel, and went once more to court, where Guinevere welcomed Enid back with joy. And though Geraint could not take the same pleasure in their friendship that he once had done, he was now quite sure that nothing could make Enid untrue to him. At last they returned to their own land, and now Geraint ruled so well and wisely that his former neglect was quite forgotten. The court ladies called Enid 'Enid the Fair,' but the people of Devon learnt to name her 'Enid the Good.' And little Enids and Geraints were born, whom they trained up well and wisely. Never again did Geraint distrust his wife; but they lived happily together, until at length Geraint, like Edyrn, fell in a great battle of the King's, fighting for him against traitors and the savage Saxons.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

IF you look at the map of England you will see, far beyond the Land's End, a group of islands called the Scilly Isles. If our story is to be believed, these were not islands in the days of King Arthur, but were joined to Cornwall and formed part of a country called Lyonesse. Here lived Sir Anton, Arthur's foster-father, and here Arthur himself was brought up. It was a wild, barren country, full of rough hills and valleys of which man made no use except to graze a few sheep. For the rest, they were left to the deer and the eagle and other wild creatures.

Wandering over these wastes—perhaps hunting, perhaps only thinking of what he would do when he was a man—young Arthur lost his way; and found himself, when night came on, in a valley which had an evil name—so evil that no one would go near it. For there in days long gone by two brothers, one of them a king, had gone to fight; and there each had slain the other with a single blow. Arthur recognized the place, but he feared no ghost, so walked on along a slope which ran down to a little lake. He felt something crack beneath his feet, and, looking down, found that he had stepped on the neck of a skeleton. Something bright was rolling down the slope towards the lake, and darting after it he seized it, and found it was a crown which had been on the skull of the skeleton he had trodden on. It was a golden ring with nine great diamonds set in it, and it had lain undisturbed so long that the very name of the king who had worn it was forgotten. As he

put the crown on his head, he thought he heard a voice which said, 'Thou also shalt be King.'

So he kept the crown carefully; and when he came to the throne he said, 'These gems were given to me by God, not for my own good, but for that of my country. I will make them prizes for tournaments. There shall be one each year, and thus my knights will be trained in arms, and we shall know which is the greatest of them.'

For eight years they fought, and eight times did Lancelot win the prize. And now the ninth and largest diamond was to be fought for at Camelot. The court was at a palace on the Thames, perhaps at Westminster, and thence King Arthur and his knights started for the jousts. The Queen had been ill, and, though better, could not travel; and Lancelot, moved by some sudden fancy, told the King that he could not fight, for he was troubled by an old wound, and so would not go to Camelot either. But when the King had gone, Guinevere urged him to go too.

'How can I go?' asked Lancelot. 'The king honours his own word as if it were God's. How can I own that I have lied about my wound?'

'That is easy,' said the Queen; 'you can tell him that you have heard rumours that your fame is so great that men go down before you at a mere touch, merely because they know that you are Lancelot; that, to see if this is so and learn whether your strength and skill are still as great as ever, you wish to fight unknown; and that for this reason you have said you will not fight. The King will approve your action if he thinks it was to win honour. He loves to see his knights win it, even better than to win it himself, for they prove to him how well he has done his work in training them.'

So, to please the Queen, Lancelot donned his arms and started for Camelot, and, lest he should be recognized, he turned aside from the highway to follow winding tracks

across the downs. Thus it came about that he lost his way, and towards evening found himself approaching a castle at Astolat, a place he had never visited before. Here he must seek lodging for the night ; so he blew the horn which hung by the castle gateway. A little, wrinkled old man opened the gate, and when Lancelot spoke he said no word, but only signed to him to enter, showed him a room, and helped him to remove his arms.

As Lancelot came out he saw a pleasant party crossing the castle court—the lord of the castle, his two sons Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine, and a fair lady who was little more than a child, his only daughter. She was named Elaine, and because of the whiteness of her skin was known as the ‘Lily Maid.’ She was the pet of all the household, and had grown up without the guidance of her mother, who had died when Elaine was but a baby. They were all laughing at some jest as they approached Sir Lancelot ; but as he came up, the Lord of Astolat greeted him hospitably, asking him his name, and saying that he could well believe him the greatest of Arthur’s knights ; he had seen Arthur, he added, but none of the Round Table.

‘Sir Knight,’ said Lancelot, ‘I am well known in Arthur’s hall, and, by mistake, I have brought my shield with me. I am going to Camelot to joust unknown for the great diamond ; so I pray you lend me a plain shield, or at least one which has some device which is not mine, so that I may not be recognized. When the joust is over I will tell you my name.’

‘You may have Torre’s shield,’ was the reply. ‘My son, Sir Torre, was hurt in his first tournament, so that he cannot fight. Hence his shield is blank enough!’

‘Yes,’ said Torre. ‘You may have it, since I do not want it.’

‘Fie!’ said his father, laughing. ‘Is that a courteous answer to a noble knight ? But young Lavaine here is so

full of courage that he is going to Camelot, and will win the diamond, and set it in his sister's hair, and make her twice as wilful as before.'

'Now that is unkind, father!' exclaimed Lavaine, blushing. 'Do not shame me before this noble knight. I was only jesting. Sir, Elaine was telling us how she had dreamt that some one came and put the diamond into her hand, and that it was so slippery that she could not hold it, but let it fall into a stream. I said that *if* I went and *if* I won it she must take better care of it than that. I was only joking. But, father, if you will give me leave, and this noble knight will consent, I will ride to Camelot with him, and, young as I am, will do my best, though of course I shall not win.'

Lancelot smiled and answered: 'I shall be very glad if you will come with me and be my guide across these downs on which I have lost my way. And if you can win the diamond—which I hear is a very fine one—then you shall win it, and you shall give it to your sister if you wish.'

Surly Sir Torre said that fair large diamonds were for queens and not for simple maids; and when Elaine, who was looking modestly on the ground as they talked about her, blushed a little at Torre's rough speech, Sir Lancelot looked at her, and said courteously, yet sincerely:

'Fair ornaments should belong to the fair. Are only queens fair? If so I make a great mistake, for I think that this lady's beauty deserves the fairest jewels.'

Elaine raised her eyes to look on the great knight who paid her this compliment. His face was not the face of a handsome young man. Noble it was, but burnt by the sun, scarred by a great sword-cut on the cheek, and marked with many a line made by time and thought and trouble. Yet to her it seemed the grandest face she had ever seen, and a great love for him filled her pure heart.

They walked into the hall, Sir Lancelot showing the truest courtesy; he was not vain of Arthur's favour or of his great name, but talked to his host and his family as to equals. As they sat at meat minstrels sang to them, and then they questioned him about the court and the Round Table, and he answered well. Presently he inquired about the dumb man who had admitted him to the castle.

'Why,' said the Baron, 'ten years ago the heathen came this way, and he warned me of their coming. I fled with my sons and daughter to a boatman's hut, but they caught the poor fellow and tore out his tongue. He has served us faithfully ever since. Those were bad days, till Arthur defeated the Saxons at Badon Hill.'

Lavaine sat admiring Sir Lancelot, as a youth admires the man who is what he hopes one day to be, and now he broke in:

'Doubtless you were there, Sir. We live here at Astolat and know nothing. Tell us about Badon Hill and Arthur's wars.'

Then Lancelot told them the story of the twelve great battles, and ended by describing the fight at Badon.

'There,' said he, 'I saw the King charge at the head of his whole Round Table, who, crying "Christ and Arthur," broke through the Saxon ranks and put the foe to flight. Then, standing on a heap of the slain, red from head to foot with the blood of the enemy, he cried, "They are broken, they are broken!" He seems mild at home, and if in a tournament he is overthrown by his own knights he laughs, saying they are better men than he. But in this war against his country's foes he seemed like one full of the Spirit of God. There never was a leader like him, never!'

'No, Sir knight, never save yourself,' thought Elaine. And still she watched him as he passed from serious talk

to jest. And when she noticed the melancholy look upon his face whenever his smile passed away, she strove to cheer him with pleasant words. Then would he reply brightly, partly from courtesy, and partly because he could not but be pleased with one so fair as she. And she thought that his brighter looks meant nothing but admiration for herself. So all through that night she lay awake dreaming of him, and thinking what a wonderful man he must be to have such a face as he had—noble in spite of scars and lines of grief and sadness.

When morning came she said to herself, 'I must rise early and say good-bye to dear Lavaine.' So, dressing hastily, she crept down the winding stairs which led to the courtyard, where were Lancelot and Lavaine ready for their ride. She heard Lancelot cry, 'Where is the shield, my friend?' and then, as Lavaine went in to fetch it, she came from the turret door, and stood watching Lancelot pat his black horse, which was eager to start. He looked up and was amazed to see the beautiful maid stand there in the morning light. Then a sudden wish came into her heart. Why should he not wear her favour at the jousts?

Now in those days ladies often gave presents—gloves or ribbons or other things of slight value—to knights, and the knights in gratitude wore them on their helmets. The lady might be pledged to marry the knight, or she might merely be his friend and wish him good luck, or perhaps he had done her some great service. But Lancelot would never wear any lady's favour. We have seen how he admired Guinevere before ever she was queen. Since she could not be his wife, he had determined never to marry, and since she was too great to give him a 'favour' to wear, he would accept one from no other. So when Elaine suddenly said, 'Fair lord, whose name I know not, will you wear my favour at this tourney?' he answered, 'No, fair lady, I have never worn any lady's favour, as any

of my friends could tell you.' 'Then,' said Elaine, 'if you do so now, there will be the less chance of your being known.'

He thought a moment, and then, seeing that what she said was true, he replied, 'True, my child. I will wear it then. What is it?' 'A red sleeve embroidered with pearls,' she replied. And so she brought it, and he bound it to his helmet, saying, 'I never did so much for any maiden before.' She blushed with delight, thinking that this was a special mark of his favour, and forgetting that he only did it as a means of disguise.

Presently Lavaine returned with Torre's shield, and Lancelot asked Elaine to keep his own for him till his return, which she gladly consented to do, calling herself his squire. Then they bade her farewell, and she walked to the gate and watched them ride away till they disappeared over the brow of a hill; and when her eyes could follow them no longer she climbed the stairs to her tower, bearing the shield with her. She must keep this treasure carefully, she thought. What if it should get rusty or dirty in its master's absence? She would make a case for it. So she made one—not plain, but beautifully embroidered. First she worked three blue lions with golden crowns, just like those on the shield itself; and then a border of her own design, of leafy branches with a nest in them and little birds thrusting up their heads out of the nest. And day by day she took the shield from its case and studied it, making up pretty stories as to why her knight should have three blue lions for his device, and picturing to herself how each cut and scratch upon the shield came there. One cut looked new, she thought, and was made at a tournament at Camelot; another was an old one and was the mark of a fight with some Saxon at Badon. And one, the deepest of them all, set her shuddering at the thought of what would have happened had not God broken

the enemy's lance and saved her lord—for so she called him to herself.

While this gentle maiden was playing the squire in this pretty ladylike way, where was Lancelot, and why did he not return? Lavaine had led him across the low grassy hills till they came near Camelot, and then Lancelot took the lead. He would not go into the town, where he might be seen and known, but turned aside to the cave of a hermit. This good man had worked and prayed here for forty years, and had dug himself out in the soft chalk rock a hermitage and a chapel, with rooms where he could house guests—all supported by white pillars cut in the solid rock. It was a pleasant, quiet place, and the sun's rays, coming through the green leaves, or reflected from the grass, shed a green light on the milk-white roofs, while, all around, the leaves of the poplars and aspens made a gentle rustling as the wind blew through them. In this pleasant place they slept until the red light of the rising sun awoke them, when they rose, went to the chapel for morning prayers, and after breakfast rode on.

Presently Lancelot told Lavaine his name, bidding him keep his secret. Lavaine was ashamed to have been talking freely to so great a man, but proud of the honour done him by Lancelot's confidence. He stammered forth, half aloud, half to himself, 'Is it indeed the great Lancelot? I have seen one! If now I can see the King, even though I am struck blind the next instant, I may indeed say I have seen!'

They soon came to the lists outside the town. Half-way round the meadow where the fight was to be, were galleries filled with people in their gayest clothes, so that it looked almost as if a rainbow had fallen on the ground. In the midst of the gallery was a marvellous throne, the arms of which were the heads and bodies of two golden dragons, whose tails curved away up the back of the chair and were

lost amidst graceful carvings of leaves and flowers. Upon the throne sat King Arthur with his great blue eyes and golden beard, clothed in a red robe, on which the dragon—the emblem of the British kings—was embroidered in gold; and hanging in the midst of a flower above his head, so that it glistened in the sunlight like a drop of dew, trembled the great diamond, the prize of that day's fight.

'You call me great,' said Lancelot to Lavaine. 'There is no greatness in me which may not be reached by many a youth here. The only greatness about me is that I know that I am not great. There is the man!'

So Lavaine stared at the King till at length the trumpet blew for the tournament to begin. This was not to be a fight between single knights. The Round Table challenged all comers, and kings, barons, and knights had come from all parts of Britain to show their skill. One party entered at each end of the field, and they charged, and met so furiously that the earth seemed to shake beneath them. Lancelot waited a while to see which side was stronger, and when he saw that the Round Table was driving back the visitors he, followed by Lavaine, joined the latter. Down went horse and man before him; every one whom he charged he overthrew; till his own friends and relatives grew angry that a mere stranger should do, or even outdo, Lancelot's deeds. 'Who is he?' asked one. 'Not only in strength but in grace and manner of fighting he is just like Lancelot.' 'Lancelot never wore a lady's favour,' replied another. 'Who can he be, then?' shouted half a dozen at once, and all in a fury charged down on him. Sometimes you may see a great wave rolling onward against the wind. Its top curls over, and the wind, catching it, blows back a cloud of foam: but dashing on, it falls on some boat and overturns it. So did these friends of Lancelot rush down on him, the plumes of their helmets

streaming behind them, their lances all levelled at him ; and one struck his shield, one his helmet, while one, badly aimed, killed his horse, and another—too well aimed, alas !—pierced his armour, entered his side, and broke off short.

Lavaine did what he could. He charged and overthrew one of the Round Table, brought his horse to Lancelot, and helped him to mount. Lancelot would not yield while he lived, so fought on despite his wound, and was so well helped by others of his party that Arthur's knights were driven back to the barrier, and the trumpet sounded for the fight to cease. Then Arthur ordered a herald to proclaim that the knight with the red sleeve had won the prize. All his party bade him advance and take the diamond, but he cried, 'Diamond me no diamonds ! For God's sake give me air ! Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death ! I will go hence, and I charge you not to follow me.'

So, followed by Lavaine, he rode slowly and painfully to the poplar grove. There he dismounted and bade Lavaine pull the lance-head from his side. 'Sir, you will die if I do,' said Lavaine. 'I am dying in any case,' said Lancelot ; 'draw as I tell you.' And so Lavaine did as he was bid. Sir Lancelot cried aloud ; half the blood seemed to gush from his body, and he fainted from mere pain. Startled by his cry, the hermit came forth from the cave, and with Lavaine's help bore in the senseless body of the knight, laid him on a bed, and stopped the flow of the blood. For weeks it was doubtful whether he would live or die. There he lay hidden in the poplar grove, often unconscious, or light-headed, and talking wildly of tournaments, and Arthur, and Guinevere. And when his senses returned for a while he lay still as death, hearing nothing but the gentle rustling of the leaves without.

Now the knights of Lancelot's party went to Arthur and told him how their champion had left them, saying that his prize was death. 'Heaven forbid !' exclaimed the King.

‘Such a knight as he must not remain uncared for. He seemed to me another Lancelot—yes, twenty times I thought he must be Lancelot. We will do him no common honour. Since he has not taken his prize we will send it after him. Gawain, ride forth and find him. Take the diamond, and do not return till you have delivered it to him.’

Now Gawain was one of the bravest and strongest of Arthur’s knights, fair-spoken and courteous, but not very trustworthy. He took the diamond now with a smile, but with an angry heart. There would be a great banquet that night, and why should he be deprived of it for the sake of a mere stranger? However, he must obey the King, so he rode off upon his search.

Arthur was not happy at the banquet. He could not help suspecting that the stranger knight was Lancelot after all; that he had come to fight despite the wound he had spoken of, and that now he had ridden away to die. Two days more he stayed at Camelot, and then returned to his palace on the Thames.

The first question he asked of Guinevere on his return, when he had been assured that her sickness had passed off, was, ‘Where is Lancelot?’

‘Why,’ said the Queen in surprise, ‘was he not in Camelot? Did he not win the prize?’

‘No, but one like him did,’ said Arthur.

‘Why, that was he,’ replied the Queen.

‘How do you know this?’ asked he.

‘Lord,’ she said, ‘no sooner had you gone than he told me how people say that his enemies fall before him because of his great name, and that he wished to see whether his strength and skill were in any way lessened. So he went to fight unknown, sure that you would approve of his wish to gain more glory.’

‘He might have trusted me instead of trifling with the

truth,' said the King. 'I am his most familiar friend, and would have kept his secret, as he might very well have known. True, I should have laughed at such a fancy on the part of my greatest knight; but now we have nothing to laugh at. His own kindred, not knowing him, attacked him, and he went from the field sorely hurt. But though this is bad news, I have some good news also to tell you. I hope that Lancelot has at last found a lady whom he loves, for he wore on his helmet some gentle maiden's favour—a scarlet sleeve embroidered with pearls.'

'That is good news: I hope so too,' said Guinevere. Then, turning away so that he should not see the look of anger on her face, she went to her own chamber, and there burst into a fit of jealous tears, calling Lancelot a false traitor.

We cannot blame Lancelot for his resolve never to marry; but he had rashly told Guinevere of it, and this made her all the more grieved that she had been forced to marry the King rather than the man of her choice. And now she selfishly wanted to keep him to his promise, and, since they could not be happy together, grudged him happiness with any one else; and this was why she called him traitor.

We must now go back to Gawain. He took the diamond, and, since no one had noticed which way Lancelot went, he rode all round the neighbourhood of Camelot except to the poplar grove. Then, going farther off, he searched the downs, till, wearied with his fruitless quest, he came at last to Astolat. Elaine, sitting in her turret, saw a knight in glittering armour approach the castle, and, guessing that he had been at the tournament, hastened down her stairs and greeted him at the gate.

'What news from Camelot?' she asked. 'What of the knight with the red sleeve?'

'He won,' replied Gawain.

'I knew it,' she exclaimed.

‘But he left the lists hurt in the side,’ went on Gawain.

She put her hand to her side as if she felt the lance piercing herself, and almost fainted ; and as he gazed upon her in surprise, out came her father, to whom Gawain told all about his useless search.

‘Search no more,’ said the Lord of Astolat. ‘He left his shield here and will return for it. Besides, my son is with him and will bring news of him by and by. Stay here till he comes or sends a message.’

So Gawain thanked him courteously, and thought in his own heart that he would employ his time in making love to the fair Elaine. And often when they met in the garden he would laugh and jest with her, or sing her songs, or tell her tales about the court, till she got vexed with him for spending his time so idly instead of doing the King’s errand.

‘Prince,’ said she, ‘you are the King’s nephew. How is it that you are not more active in the King’s business ? You have never even asked to see the shield which would tell you who the unknown knight is.’

So she brought out the shield, and he recognized it at once.

‘The King was right ! It is Lancelot’s,’ he cried.

‘And so was I,’ said Elaine, ‘for I dreamed that my knight was the greatest knight of all.’

‘Pardon me,’ said he, ‘if I dream that you love your knight.’

‘I do not know,’ said she. ‘I have no mother to tell me what true love is ; and when my brothers have talked of it, it has seemed to me that they knew not what they were talking about. But if I know what love is, then I am sure I can never love any but him.’

‘Yes, by my faith, you love him,’ said Gawain ; ‘but I am afraid he will never love a maid. Yet, since he wore your sleeve, it may be he has changed his mind, and it is

not for me to court one whom Lancelot loves. So, as I am sure you know where he is hidden, I will give you the diamond to give to him. It will be sweet for you to give it : and, if he loves you, it will be sweet for him to receive it from you. Here it is then. Farewell a thousand times. If he loves you, we shall meet again at court.'

So saying, he gave her the diamond, kissed her hand, and rode away to court, where he told Arthur what he had done, saying that it was the truest courtesy to give the diamond to the maid whom Lancelot loved.

'You are too courteous,' said the King. 'I will never send you on an errand again, since you forget that obedience is the courtesy due to Kings.'

Gawain stood a while ashamed and angry at this reproof, and watched the King as he walked away. Then he went and gossiped, now with one, now with another, about his news, till on every side was heard, 'Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat'; 'The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot'; 'Who is she?' 'An unknown maid is not likely to be worthy of so great a knight.' At the banquet that evening some of the knights forgot the usual toast of 'Lancelot, bravest of knights, and Guinevere, fairest of ladies!' and drank to the health of 'Lancelot and the Lily Maid,' and Guinevere smiled, while crushing her feet against the floor in anger, and hating those who coupled these two names together.

Gawain had not long left Astolat when Elaine stole into a room where her father was sitting. She sat down on his knee, and stroking his beard, began :

'Father, you call me wilful. Well, if I am so, it is your fault, for you have always let me have my will. Now do you want me to lose my wits?'

'Why, of course not,' said he.

'Then, father, let me go and look for dear Lavaine.'

'You will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine,' he

answered. 'Wait a while and he will come back, and that other.'

'Ah!' said Elaine, 'I must go and find that other, for I cannot be as faithless to my trust as that gay prince who left the diamond with me. I dream of that other at night, and see him pale and ill and ready to die for want of some gentle lady's help. The gentler born we are, the more bound we are to nurse sick knights, especially when they have worn our favours.'

'Well,' said her father, 'I should be glad to hear that he is well; and he ought to have the diamond. Being so very wilful, you must go.'

So next morning with Sir Torre she started for Camelot; and outside the city they came upon Lavaine exercising his horse. At once she cried to him, asking how Lancelot fared.

'Torre and Elaine!' he exclaimed. 'How come you here? And how do you know my lord's name?'

Then Elaine told him about Gawain's visit, and he told her where Lancelot was. Torre went on to the house of some relatives of theirs within the city, but Lavaine led her to the poplar grove.

The first thing she saw on entering the cave was Lancelot's helmet, and she laughed when she saw her own sleeve still tied to it, though half its pearls had been cut away. She thought perhaps he would wear it again some other day. But she laughed no more when she saw his thin, pale form lying on the bed and looking more like a skeleton than a living man. At this sight a little cry came from her lips, and woke him from his sleep. At once she slipped the diamond into his hands and told him how she came by it. He thought her but a child, and kissed her as he would have done a child who had done some task he had set. And she, poor girl, took it to be a mark of love, and blushed deeply. He, looking at her, half suspected what her feelings

were, and was grieved ; but all he did was to pretend to sleep until he really slept.

Then she left him and went to her friends in Camelot. And next morning she returned, and many days she spent with him, nursing him with all care and not leaving him till evening ; and the hermit told her that her gentle care for him had done more good than all his medicines. And Lancelot, forgetting all about that blush, would talk to her as if she had been his sister, watched for her coming, felt lonely when she left him, and would have done anything to prove his gratitude to her. Perhaps, if it had not been for his love for the Queen, he would have loved Elaine as she did him.

At last he was well enough to travel, and rode back to Astolat with the brother and sister. And there he lingered, ever asking Elaine what he could do to repay her kindness. She would say nothing ; but he always thought she had some request which she would make if she were not too bashful ; so at last, meeting her one day in the garden, he said :

‘ Delay no longer to make your request, for to-day I must leave you.’

‘ Must I die for want of one bold word ? ’ she exclaimed.

‘ It is due to you that I am alive to hear such a word,’ he replied ; ‘ so speak on.’

‘ I have gone mad. I love you. Let me die,’ said she.

‘ My sister, what is this ? ’ he asked.

‘ Make me your wife,’ she cried, holding out her arms towards him.

‘ I shall never marry, my sweet Elaine,’ said he.

‘ I care not,’ cried she wildly. ‘ Let me be your servant and follow you wherever you go.’

‘ That,’ he said, ‘ would be a poor return to make for all your father’s and your brother’s kindness. It cannot be.’

‘Then,’ said Elaine, ‘all my good days are done.’

‘Not so,’ he said : ‘this is not love, but only a child’s fancy. One day you will love a knight not three times your age, as I am, and then will I give him large estates in my own land in France—even half my possessions there. And I will fight your battles to the death.’

‘I want nothing of all this,’ she said, and fell down in a faint.

She was carried off to her own room, and the voice of her father came from behind a thick hedge, where he had heard all that they had said.

‘I fear, Sir Lancelot, that this “child’s fancy,” as you call it, will be the death of her. You are too courteous. Use some discourtesy to break her passion.’

‘That would be against my nature,’ he said, ‘but I will try what I can do.’

In the evening he sent for his shield, and she took the precious thing from its case and sent it to him. Then she listened till she heard his horse’s hoofs on the stones of the courtyard, when she threw open her window and looked out. He heard the sound of the window, but would not look round, and rode away, bidding her no farewell. This was the one discourtesy he used to her.

But did it break her passion ? Alas, no ! The shield was gone. Only the useless case remained to remind her how Sir Lancelot was to be nothing to her in future. Her father came to comfort her, but all in vain. Her brothers came and talked about the little affairs of the castle in the hope of turning her thoughts away from Lancelot. She answered them all sweetly and gently, but could not forget. Her heart was broken, and little by little she pined away. Soon she could not leave her bed. One morning the whole house was awakened by the sound of a sweet voice singing. They thought it was a spirit which was said to sing whenever one of the family was about to die,

and her father and brothers hurried to her room. She was sitting up in her bed with the red light of the rising sun shining on her face, and singing a song she had made herself about love and death—how love is sweet even if not returned, and death is sweet because it ends all pain—and as they entered her room she sang the last words, 'Let me die,' and sank back on her couch.

She bade them good morning, and then told them of a dream she had had.

'My brothers,' she began, 'you remember how, when we lived in the boatman's house, you used to row me up the river, and how you would never pass the point with the poplar on it, but came back as the tide turned? And how I often cried to go farther, saying I wanted to see the great King's palace? Last night I dreamt that I was alone on the river, floating up stream, and I said to myself, "Now I shall have my way." Then I awoke, but still I had that wish. Let me go to the King's palace and enter in, and none will mock at me. Gawain, who bade me a thousand farewells, shall see me, and Lancelot, who bade me none. And the King and Queen will pity me, and all the court welcome me.'

'Why, my child, you are too sick to move,' said the father. 'How can you go so far, and why do you want to see that proud fellow who scorns you?'

She said no more about it then, but asked to see a priest before she died. When the holy man had visited her, she called Lavaine and asked him to write a letter for her. The letter written, she said to her father:

'Dear father, you have never denied my fancies yet: deny me not this last one. I must take this letter to court myself. When I die, dress me in my finest clothes, and carry me on my bed down to the river. There put the bed on a barge covered with black cloth, and my letter in my hand, and let our dumb old servant row me to the court.'



HER BROTHERS BORE HER TO THE BOAT

Her father promised to do as she asked, and then she grew so cheerful that they thought she was getting better ; but it was not so, and eleven days later she passed away. They did as she had asked. Her brothers bore her to the boat, put the letter and a lily in her hands, looked for the last time on her dear face, and went sadly home.

Lancelot seems to have gone from Astolat to his own castle and stayed there for a while, for it was not till the day after Elaine's death that he saw the Queen. On that day he proposed to give her the diamond for which he had fought each year for nine years, diamonds for which he had almost died, and for which others had been killed in the jousts. He sent a message asking to be allowed to see her ; she gave her consent, and waited for him in a room overlooking the river. There she sat by a window which stood wide open, the summer day being hot. Lancelot knelt down and offered to her the glittering stones, saying :

'Lady, make me happy by accepting these jewels. They may make a bracelet for the roundest arm on earth, or a necklace for a neck as much whiter than a swan's as a swan's is whiter than its cygnet's. Queen, I hear rumours in the court that I love another, contrary to the vow I swore to you. I cannot think that you who know me believe this.'

'Ah, Sir Lancelot !' she replied, 'perhaps I believe more easily than you think. What are these ? Diamonds for me ? They would have been precious if given with a loyal heart, but now—— Give them to this Elaine. Add these diamonds to her pearls. Tell her that they will make a bracelet for an arm rounder than the Queen's, or a necklace for a neck as much fairer than mine as—as your faith was once fairer than it is now. Nay,' she added in a rage, 'they are not hers yet. She shall not have them.'

So saying, she snatched up the stones from the table on which they lay, and flung them through the window into the river. There was a splash, and they were gone for ever.

Lancelot leaned upon the window-sill, sick at seeing such a gift treated thus ; sick at the Queen's distrust and jealousy ; wishing the diamonds were still upon the skull of that forgotten king, and that he had never seen the Queen, when lo ! beneath the window passed the barge bearing Elaine's body.

It passed on to the river gate of the palace, and there the marble stair was filled with a wondering crowd. The pale, fair face of Elaine, the rough features of the dumb man, seemed to come from another world. 'He is enchanted and cannot speak,' said one. 'She is the queen of the fairies,' said a second. 'They come to bear the King to Fairyland,' said a third, 'for it is said that Arthur will go there and never die.'

Then came Arthur and his knights, and he bade the two purest of them, Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale, bear Elaine into the hall. Gawain and Lancelot saw her as she had said they would, and the King and Queen pitied her. Then Arthur saw the letter in her hand and read it aloud to them all.

'Sir Lancelot, I, the maid of Astolat, since you left me taking no farewell, come hither to take my last farewell of you. I loved you, but you loved me not : and so I died. My lady Guinevere, and all ladies, pity me and pray for my soul. Pray for me too, Sir Lancelot, thou knight without an equal.'

Then Lancelot told them all the tale, and why he had not bade her farewell, and that had he dreamed she would die, he might have tried to save her by some worse discourtesy.

'You might have done her so much favour,' said the Queen.

Then Lancelot told her of all the offers he had made her, and how he had hoped her love was but a passing fancy, and Guinevere said no more ; but as she passed him later

on she murmured a prayer for his forgiveness, which he granted readily.

All that day and night the body lay in the hall ; but next day Arthur, at the head of all his knights, led a stately procession to the great cathedral : and there with organ-music, chants, and incense they laid the simple maiden in a tomb amongst those of mighty kings. And Arthur bade them make a monument on which should be a statue of Elaine lying as she was in her last voyage with a letter and a lily in her hands, and that Lancelot's shield should be carved at her feet.

But Lancelot went down to the river bank and threw himself on the grass. Far away he could see a black blot on the stream—the barge going back to Astolat. And there, groaning at all the evil he had caused, he lamented that he had ever been born. What mattered it to him that he was called the greatest knight ? Men's praise gave him no pleasure, though to lose it would give him pain. His life was ruined by his hopeless love for Guinevere. He ought to have fought against it, for such a feeling was treachery to his beloved master. Could he fight against it now ? He did not know, but prayed that if he did not wish to do so God would slay him then and there.

MERLIN AND VIVIEN

THIS is to be a sad story. Long ago Merlin had told Bellicent that 'an old man's wit may wander ere he die,' and now he was to prove the truth of his own saying.

Things were not going well at the court of King Arthur. He had thought that he would not only establish law and good order in his realm, but that he would make his court a model of good living which all his subjects might copy. He believed that men might be made as good and noble as himself, and so had made his knights swear, not only to fight for and obey their King, but to fight against the evil in their own natures and to obey the King of kings. For this purpose he had sought a queen who would, he thought, help him, and, by word and example, make his court pure. But Guinevere, for all her grace and beauty and courtesy, was not a noble woman, and the courtiers soon learnt this fact; and while still following outwardly the examples of the King and Queen, cared little for real goodness and nobility. Some few there were, like Galahad, Percivale, Geraint, and Gareth, who strove to be like the King: but most of them, when their first enthusiasm had worn off, forgot all about their vows, and, except when called upon to go forth and fight, led lives of self-indulgence; so that Camelot was full of scandals, and even if a man was trying his hardest to do the right no one would believe it. Gossip and slander filled up the idle hours of both knights and ladies.

There was among Guinevere's ladies one named Vivien.

She was small and dark and graceful, and looked much younger than she really was. Her playful ways were like those of a kitten, and a stranger would have thought her the simplest and most innocent girl in the world. But she was bad at heart, cunning and cruel as a cat, and all her playfulness was but a disguise. The courtiers knew her real character ; and while they amused themselves by talking and jesting with her they despised her in their hearts.

An evil tale had been spread through the court, and had reached King Arthur's ears. He, whether believing it or not, was saddened by this new proof of his failure, and was standing one day by himself, with a gloomy look upon his brow, when Vivien stole up to him, and talked as if to comfort him. She hinted that Guinevere neglected him, and that she herself cared more for him than did his own wife. The King, amazed at her boldness, said not a word, gazed over her head as if he did not see her, and turned away. But the matter did not end there. In that scandal-loving court nothing was unnoticed, and some one who had overheard her spread the story far and wide, till every one was laughing at Vivien's impertinence. This made her hate the courtiers and even the King who had slighted her words of affection ; so she looked around to see how she might be avenged, or at least show herself to be a person who was not to be despised.

'If the King looks down upon me,' she said to herself, 'I will see what I can do with Merlin.'

Now Merlin was the wisest man in Arthur's court. He was a poet, an architect, an engineer, an astrologer. He was said to be a wizard and to have dealings with evil spirits, but this was not true. He knew all the secrets of nature, and spells which would control it, but he always used his magic for good purposes, and served the King most faithfully. He was very old now—had been old even

when Arthur was born; but though his eyes were rather dim, and his great grey beard flowed down to his waist, his limbs were yet strong.

Vivien had no clear plans at first; if she could only make Merlin her friend she might make use of him in some way. She might perhaps get him to use his magic against her enemies, or even make him false to the King. At all events, if she had such a friend as Merlin no one would dare to despise her. So she set herself to win his attention, smiling at him, jesting, and, if she talked scandal, doing it in such a way that he could not help laughing. At first he half-despised her, but when she had won his attention she changed her manner, became grave, talked of her dead father whom she had never seen, and how she thought he must have been like Merlin. She wished, she said, that she had such a father—so wise, so good—and gradually there grew up a friendship between them, he regarding her as a daughter and loving her dearly, though he was too wise not to see some of her faults; she acting a part, always careful in attending to his wants, flattering him, and pretending an affection which was altogether false.

She would often talk to him about magic, but he did not care to discuss that with her. It was a subject, he said, for old men, not for young girls. It was true that there were spells which any one could practise, but to discover them and to know why and how they worked required long study and the knowledge of many sciences. As for telling them to her, he would as soon let a child play with fire. But she always came back to the same subject; and one day, not thinking what he was doing, Merlin told her of a terrible spell. If any one walked in certain circles and waved his arms in certain ways about another, that other could never leave the place where he was. He was lost and forgotten, could see no one but him who had worked the charm, and be seen by none but him. From this time forth Vivien

gave him no peace. She was for ever begging him to teach her this spell.

There came a time when a great melancholy fell upon Merlin, and one day he left the court and walked to the seashore. There he found a boat and stepped into it, followed by Vivien, who had been watching him. He took the sail and she the helm, and so they sailed across the sea to Brittany, and landing there, made their way to a great forest. He led the way and she followed. He did not seem to notice that she was there, for his mind was filled with a vision of a great wave which was about to fall upon him and drown him.

He stopped at length and seated himself on the root of a great hollow oak, and then she made up her mind that he *should* notice her. At first she clung about his feet and begged him to trample on her if he would, but not to leave her unheeded any longer. Then she sat on his knee and asked him if he loved her, and when she had asked the question two or three times he said, 'Those who are wisest speak least of their love.' 'Then I will be silent,' said she, 'and lo! I clothe myself with wisdom.' And saying this she drew his great beard about her, and called herself a pretty fly caught in a great spider's web. And so she went on talking nonsense till he smiled and said, 'What is the favour you are going to ask? All these pretty tricks of yours are leading up to some request. Yet I thank you for them. for they have broken up my melancholy.'

'What, my master! Have you found your tongue at last?' said she. 'Do you know that when we were thirsty yesterday I made a pretty cup for you of my own hands and brought you water, and that you never thanked me? And that when we were weary I bathed your feet before my own and you took no notice. It is true that I have a simple boon to ask of you, but how can I ask anything of one so ungrateful?'

Then Merlin said, 'For three days I have had a vision of a mighty wave which was about to fall on me and overwhelm me. Then I rose and left the court; and ever as I saw you follow me I felt, in my confusion, that you were that wave. Pardon me, my child. I have wronged you in this, though I could not help it; and I now owe you thanks for these pretty sports of yours: so tell me what this boon is.'

Vivien smiled sadly and said, 'Ah, Merlin, you are a prophet, but you cannot interpret your own prophecies. You do not know what that wave, which you saw, meant. It was mistrust of me which will ruin our friendship and your noble nature. If you trusted me could you ever have thought that I was a wave to destroy you? Now prove your trust. Tell me the charm of woven paces and of waving arms about which I have asked so often. By giving me some little power over you, you will prove your trust in me, and I shall know that you really regard me as your dear daughter, and shall ever try to show myself worthy of your trust. It makes me angry to think you can mistrust me. I swear by Heaven that I could not even think of harming you. If I ever dreamt of treachery to you may the earth split open, swallow me, and crush me flat!'

'Oh, Vivien,' said Merlin, 'I was a fool ever to tell you of that charm. You call yourself a fly: you are more like a gnat which comes back to trouble us again however often we beat it off. You are not a simple child, and I will not give myself into your power. Ask some other boon.'

'No, master, do not be angry with your little maid,' said Vivien. 'Did you never hear the song, "Trust me not at all, or all in all"? I will sing it to you.'

And then she sang a sweet song which shows how any mistrust of one whom we love will always grow till the love is ruined. And she sang so sweetly and looked so pretty

that Merlin half believed her to be trustworthy. But he knew that this was weakness, and he told her of another song that he had heard on that same spot when he was young—a song of war and noble deeds, which stirred up men to fight. But this song of hers, he said, made him feel as if some one were working on him the charm she sought to know—which would rob a man of all his use and fame.

‘Fame,’ said Vivien, ‘is shared by those who love. But what, after all, is fame? Is it a good name after our deaths? That is useless to us. Is it men’s praise while we live? Why, that is always mixed with blame. Your wisdom only makes men jealous of you, and they call you a child of the Devil.’

‘Fame,’ replied Merlin, ‘is nothing when compared to use. It was because I was useful to men that I won my fame; and that fame has made me more useful. I have no children, so care nothing for fame after my death; and now I do not fear this charm because it would take my fame from me, but because it would destroy my use. Ask it no more; I hardly think that you would play me false, for I believe you really love me now. But, having the power, you might some day wish to keep me to yourself, or in some sudden fit of anger work on me a charm which you could never undo.’

She pretended to be very angry at this speech. ‘Very well,’ she said. ‘I have sworn, and yet am not trusted. I shall find out your secret, and then shall not be bound by my oath. And pray, why did you invent this charm? I suppose you judge others by yourself, and have many captives shut up here and there by its means.’

‘I did not invent it,’ said Merlin. ‘It is old—very old. Shall I tell you the story of it in return for your song? Very far away in the East there lived a king whose capital was by the seashore. Many ships came there to trade, and among them a pirate vessel which was full of booty won from many ships and many lands. Its captain had one

morning seen the ships of two cities fighting—fighting for a lovely maiden who was on one of the ships, and whom the kings of both the cities wished to make their queen. The pirate settled the matter, for he thrust his ship between the two fleets, and, though half his men were killed by arrows, he carried off the lady. The king to whose port he took her also wished to wed her, but the pirate said she should be his own bride. Then the king was very angry, and, saying that pirates had no right to live, he slew him. Thus he won his wife, but his trouble was not over. She was so beautiful that every one who saw her loved her. Even beasts worshipped her. Camels would kneel down before her and elephants ring with their trunks the bells she wore upon her golden anklets. The king's soldiers and councillors would turn traitors and plot to kill him that they might carry off his queen. At last the king sent a proclamation through all his wide realms calling upon any wise man who could help him to come and bring some charm which would stop the mischief. Any who succeeded should be given vast wealth, but all who failed should be slain—for he did not want pretenders to come with useless charms. Many came, and their charms may have been good ones, but they were not so strong as the natural charm of the queen's beauty: and many a wizard's head was to be seen on the city walls. At last the king's messengers found a little bald old man. He had lived in the wilds caring for nothing but wisdom. He lived on herbs and was little more than skin and bone. By fasting and waking and study he had learnt to see and know what no others know. He could see into men's souls, and hear the talk of spirits, and knew all the secrets of nature. He could darken the sun at midday and raise storms or calm them. The messengers dragged him all unwilling to the king, and he taught him the charm of which I told you. The queen became invisible to all but the king; but when he offered

the reward to the wizard, the wizard refused it, went back to his desert, fasted and studied and learnt till the day of his death, and left all his learning written down in a book which has come to me.'

'Ah!' said Vivien with a smile, 'the charm is written in a book, is it? You had better tell it me at once, for though you lock that book away ever so carefully, or bury it ever so deep in the earth, I will find means to see it.'

'Ah, my pretty Vivien!' said Merlin, smiling in his turn, 'what good do you think it would do you to see this book? It has but twenty pages, and each page only a little square of text in the middle of a wide margin, and each square is a mighty charm, written in letters no larger than the limbs of fleas. But then they are in a language so old that none can read them. And the margins are covered with notes commenting on the text, and the notes are in a language which no living man can read save me. And amongst those comments I found this charm—a thing so simple that any child could use it, and none could ever undo the mischief. Ask me no more, for even if you did not use the spell on me you might on some other, perhaps on some of the Round Table, because you think they gossip about you.'

Now Vivien was really angry and railed against the knights, not one of whom, she said, was true to his vows. And when Merlin told her she was talking wildly, she began to tell tales about one knight after another, some perhaps true, some false, but all disgraceful, and so went on till she made out that even Lancelot was a coward. But when she came to talk about the King and call him a coward and a fool, Merlin could bear it no longer, and muttered to himself how Arthur was too high to be understood by base minds: how the knights were all brave, many generous, and some pure and good: how Vivien must be evil indeed to think such evil of others: that one who flatters you to

your face is generally a backbiter: that did he trust Vivien she would rail against him as she did against others; and that he was weary of her.

She caught a word or two of what he said, and hearing some harsh names thought that they were meant for her; and had she had a knife she would have stabbed him dead. But she had not, so she acted a part once more. She began weeping like a beaten child, and at last sobbed out:

‘Cruel, cruel! Was ever man so cruel as this? I trusted him, I loved him like a daughter, I did all a woman could to win his trust; and now he calls me names I cannot for shame repeat! Would that I had loved a lesser man, for he would have had a kinder heart. The King, the knights, the court, seemed poor and mean compared to him, and to make him seem great by contrast I railed against them. And then he calls me—— What now is left me but to seek some lonely spot to die in?’

She turned to walk away, weeping bitterly, and his heart was softened. His love for her made him forget his wisdom, and he half-believed her true. A storm was coming on, and he stepped within the hollow oak and called to her to shelter there. Then as she still stood sobbing he again and again used soothing words till she crept to his feet once more. But when he laid his hand upon her head she rose and said with mock indignation:

‘There must be no more talk of friendship between us if you think me what you said. How can I love one who despises me? No, it was a mere fancy before when I wished to know the charm. Now it is a matter of necessity. Only that mark of trust can wipe out the insult you have offered me. You will not grant it? Very well, I go; but I can never cease to love you. Yet ere I go hear me pray that if I ever schemed against you Heaven may send a flash that will burn me to a cinder.’

She had scarcely spoken when there was a terrible clap

of thunder and a blinding flash which struck a huge tree close by them, strewing the ground with splinters. Fearing that her impious prayer had been heard, she sprang to Merlin crying, 'Save me, though you do not love me,' and then, though she saw that she had escaped, she clung to him all through the storm, half in fear, half in cunning, calling him her dear protector, her bard, her silver star, and fifty other fond names. She blamed herself for her slanderous words, and talked and talked and talked. Meantime the storm raged all about them; the rain poured down in torrents, and ever and anon a lightning-flash showed him her lovely face full of terror; till at last, worn out with her entreaties and his own fatigue, he let her have her will, told her the charm, and as the storm passed off sank down to sleep.

Vivien arose in triumph: she had got her way. She took the mystic steps around him, waving her hands as he had directed, and Merlin lay like one dead in the hollow oak, lost to life, and use, and fame.

Then she cried aloud, 'I have made his glory mine, the fool!' and fled from the forest. And the forest echoed 'Fool!'



SHE TOOK THE MYSTIC STEPS AROUND HIM

THE DOWNFALL OF THE ROUND TABLE

THUS Merlin, Arthur's wisest counsellor, disappeared. Sir Galahad, his holiest knight, had gone to a better world. Sir Percivale, the next to him in purity of life, was now a monk ; and as these good men one after another left the court, it grew worse and worse. The base Modred, working secretly against the King, ever made more friends, and having made men friends made them almost as base as himself. Perhaps you will remember how, when his mother Bellicent took him to the court of King Leodogran, he listened at the door when she sent him away because she wanted to talk about secret things. He had not improved since then, and was still a spy and an eavesdropper.

He had long hated Lancelot, and this was the reason of his hate. The Queen and her courtiers, clad all in green, had, as was the custom, gone forth at sunrise to gather may-blossoms on May Day. On their return to court the Queen retired into a garden, and Modred, hoping to learn some secret, climbed up and lay on the garden wall to watch and listen. He saw the Queen sitting between the best and the worst of her ladies, Enid and Vivien ; but had no time to see more, for Lancelot, passing by, saw some one lying like a great green caterpillar on the wall, took him by the heel, and cast him to the ground. Then, seeing that it was a nephew of the King whom he had treated so roughly, he made some apology, showing none of the scorn which he felt ; for Arthur's best knights thought scorn unworthy of them. If a man was ugly and deformed they pardoned him if he scorned another, thinking that he could no more

help it than he could help his ugliness ; but they would have despised themselves had they not ever been polite. So Lancelot helped Modred to his feet. But in spite of his apologies, Modred never pardoned him.

When the Queen heard this story she laughed at first, but then she shuddered ; for she knew something of Modred's nature, and that he would never be content unless he could be avenged on Lancelot, and perhaps on herself and on all whom Lancelot loved. Why should Modred spy upon her if he did not wish her ill ? Years passed by, and Modred took no open steps to injure them, but still she feared ; and one night she had a dreadful dream. She was, she thought, watching the setting sun, when some fearful shape flew towards her from the West. She could not tell what it was, but turned to flee, when lo ! her shadow stretched right across the land, darkening everything. Towns were burning in it, men fighting, women and children crying aloud in fear ; and then she woke. But the trouble did not leave her mind. Some evil was coming, she was sure ; and for that evil she was to blame : so much the dream seemed to show.

Next morning Arthur received news from a distant part of his kingdom that he was wanted there. He was likely to be absent for some time, and so he appointed Modred to act as his deputy till his return.

Modred at once saw a chance of working out one of his evil plans. He arranged that a false message should be brought to Lancelot telling him of a rebellion in his realm in France. Lancelot called all his knights together, and told them to be ready to start that night. He thought that he must say good-bye to Guinevere before he went, and she promised to see him at noon. Modred heard of this, and thought he would play the listener once more, so hid himself, where he could hear every word that passed between them.

'Madam,' said Lancelot, 'I come to take my leave. There is a rebellion in my land across the narrow seas, and though I may soon put that down, there is so much business that has long been neglected that I must be absent for at least a year.'

'And how shall I live in the meantime?' asked she. 'You know that I care nothing for the King, and that I have only been able to bear my life here because I have seen you from time to time.'

'Do you not think I shall suffer too?' he asked in return. 'Shall I not miss my sovereign who has always been so gracious and kind to me?'

'Be that as it may,' she replied, 'if you leave Camelot, so do I. I shall ride secretly to Almesbury and seek refuge with the nuns there.'

'Madam,' said he, 'if you flee from the court like this, you will lose your good name.'

'I care nothing for that,' she exclaimed. 'I cannot any longer keep up the pretence of love for that cold unloving King.'

Lancelot begged her to think better of her resolve, but all in vain. No thought of duty or good name would hold her back. Go she must and go she would; so, after using all the arguments he could think of, Lancelot kissed her hand and left her. That night with all his train he set out for Cardiff, whence he sailed to France: and an hour later Guinevere stole from the palace, mounted a horse which she had arranged should be kept saddled for her, and rode to Almesbury. The nuns did not know her, and she gave no name. She said she was a lady in trouble, and that was enough for them. They gave her a room, and a little novice to wait on her and keep her company, and there she dwelt, thinking always of the hard lot which had driven her to marry one she did not love.

Meanwhile Modred, who knew the truth perfectly well,

started a report that Lancelot had carried her off to France. No one had seen which way she rode, and in that scandal-loving court the rumour was believed by all. Now Modred would have his revenge. This news would be brought to the King as soon as he returned, and he would think that his best friend had betrayed him. Who could doubt that he would avenge himself on Lancelot ?

Things happened exactly as he expected. Arthur came back and found no Guinevere. Every one feared to tell him what they thought was true, but it could not be hidden that both Lancelot and the Queen were gone ; and finding that no one would tell him anything, he began to think they had gone together. He sent for Modred and asked him if this was so, and Modred assured him that it was. So the unhappy King, as soon as he could raise an army, sailed for France to punish Lancelot. Lancelot had by this time discovered the trick played on him. He had hastened to his capital town, Benwicke, and found all quiet there. When he heard of Arthur's landing he sent no army to meet him, but only messengers who declared his innocence. But Guinevere had disappeared, none knew where, so Arthur would not believe him, and laid siege to Benwicke. Lancelot had a great army with him and might easily have driven off King Arthur's men ; but he would not fight against his lord. Gawain, who had a private quarrel with Lancelot, came daily before the walls and challenged him to fight, but he would not raise a hand against his master or any of his kin. Sir Bors, Sir Lionel, and other knights accepted the challenge, however, and Gawain always defeated them ; but others came out and carried them back into the town before they were slain.

At last Gawain's insults became so bitter that Lancelot felt bound to avenge them. He came out, therefore, and for three hours the two knights fought, first on horseback and then on foot. For a long time it seemed as if Gawain

must win. His strength was so great and so heavy were his blows that Lancelot received many wounds ; but still he fought on, and at last struck Gawain so fiercely on the head with his sword that he cut through his helmet, wounded him on the top of the head, and felled him to the ground. Gawain called upon him to slay him, but Lancelot said he would never strike a fallen foe : so he left him lying there, and Gawain was carried to Arthur's camp, where he slowly recovered.

Lancelot once more told the King how he loved him, pointed out that he could fight if he would, but that he would never fight his old master and friend ; and perhaps Arthur might have given up the siege but for the advice of Gawain, who would not forgive Lancelot for the wrong he had done him, and was determined to fight him once more. In three weeks' time, when his wound was healed, he again challenged Lancelot with insulting words, and once more they fought. This time Lancelot, who had learned by experience, avoided Gawain's blows and let him tire himself out before attacking him. At last, finding that Gawain's strength was lessening, he once more struck him on the head, and, as ill luck would have it, re-opened the old wound. Once more Gawain bade him finish his work, and once more Lancelot refused to slay a helpless man, and retired, Gawain shouting out to him that he would challenge him again as soon as he was well.

For a month he lay sick, but he was getting better and expecting soon to be fit for a third fight, when news came which summoned Arthur back to England in haste. Modred had proclaimed himself king.

Now before going to France, Arthur had made Modred regent till he should return, and Modred took advantage of this to send letters all over Britain saying that Arthur had been slain in battle, and that as he had left no son, he, Modred, was heir to the throne. He was therefore

crowned at Canterbury before the falsehood was found out ; and when news was brought that Arthur was returning from France, he again wrote letters summoning all knights and barons to come to Camelot. The ungrateful Britons said among themselves that Modred would be a better king than Arthur. Arthur had filled the country with war, and Modred would fill it with joy and bliss. They forgot that the wars had been for the country's good—that Arthur had driven out the Romans and the Saxons, and had done away with the robber knights and barons, and had given them justice and quiet ; and so very many of them flocked to Modred.

He hastened down to Dover to oppose Arthur's landing, and there was a great battle in which many a knight fell : but Arthur landed and drove back Modred, who retreated to a place called Barendown. Gawain took no part in the fight. The journey had exhausted him : and when, after he had given orders about burying the dead, Arthur went to see him, he found him in a fever and at the point of death. He was sorry now for all his violence. He knew that Arthur would need Lancelot's help, and that the King might have made peace but for his own advice. So before his death he wrote a letter to Lancelot saying that he repented of his malice, and begging that he would come to the King's aid. He was now so weak that it was clear that his end was near. A priest was sent for to perform the last rites of religion, and then he passed away, praying the King to send for Lancelot.

When his funeral was over the King left Dover and followed Modred to Barendown, where there was another bloody battle, and Modred was again defeated : but he drew off his troops and retreated slowly, Arthur following him right across the South of England to Lyonesse.

We must now go back to Guinevere. Weeks and months passed by, and she was still living at Almesbury, thinking

at first only of her own selfish sorrow. But from time to time news came to the nunnery of what was going on. First, how every one believed that she had gone to France with Lancelot: then how the King had made war upon his old friend: then how Modred had usurped the crown, and how the land was once more torn by civil war. Her dream then had come true. Her shadow was blackening the land, and war and burning cities and the wails of widows and orphans were the result of her flight. How the people must hate her! So her grief became deeper and deeper, and the little maid who waited on her wondered what it could be that made this beautiful lady so sad, and tried her best to comfort her by her simple talk.

‘Weep no more, lady,’ she said one day, ‘for your sorrows cannot come from any evil deeds of your own. Think how much more cause for grief the King has, fighting against Lancelot, who keeps the Queen in his strong castle, whilst Modred turns traitor at home. He grieves for himself and the Queen and his country, and must be thrice as sorry as any of us can be. If I am sorry I weep by myself for a little while and no one knows anything about it. But a great man like the King cannot hide his grief, and that makes it far more bitter. Why, even here in quiet Almesbury, they talk of the good King and the wicked Queen.’

‘Will the child kill me with her innocent talk?’ said the Queen to herself. But aloud she asked if she must not grieve for the King like all loyal subjects.

‘Why,’ said the maid, ‘all women must grieve that a woman has overthrown the Round Table which Arthur founded amongst signs and miracles long years ago.’

‘What then do you know of Kings and Round Tables and miracles?’ asked Guinevere.

‘Oh, I know a great deal,’ said the novice. ‘Before the Queen came the whole land was full of wonders. My



HER GRIEF BECAME DEEPER AND DEEPER

father was one of the first knights of the Round Table, and was present when it was founded. He rode to Camelot from Lyonesse, and, a little after sunset, heard strange music, so paused and turned. On every headland of Lyonesse there burned a star, and the sea broke at their feet like fire; and in this strange light he could see that the sea was full of mermen and mermaids, who were singing to the elves and fairies of the land; and these were answering with music that sounded like a distant horn. Next morning he saw three spirits—tiny little fairies mad with joy, dashing down upon some wayside flower which shook beneath their weight. And every evening he saw the fairies dance in rings about the path by which he rode. And at Camelot a ring of dancers swung in the air about the lantern on the roof. And when he entered the hall he found such a banquet as has never been seen; for whatever food a man wished for the fairies brought him. Everything was glad before the sinful Queen came to spoil all.

‘They were poor prophets,’ said the Queen. ‘Could not some of them—not even your wise father—foresee the ills which have come?’

‘Yes, there was one,’ she replied. ‘He was a poet, and he sang a song that night. First he told of Arthur’s glorious wars: he reproved Arthur’s enemies who said he was the son of Gorlois, and told how Arthur had been washed ashore at Tintagel on the Cornish coast; how no one knew whence he came: how he had been proved King by miracles: how his end should be as mysterious as his birth. And then he sang that if Arthur could find a woman as great as he, they might change the world. But suddenly he paused and dropped his harp. He all but fainted, and would have fallen if others had not held him up. He would not tell what his vision was, but who can doubt that he foresaw the evil work the Queen has done?’

And so she went on prattling and, while she sought to comfort, only hurt; for every subject that she talked about seemed to lead to blame of the Queen or Lancelot; till the Queen, thinking that the Abbess and the nuns knew who she was and wished to make her confess it, and so had set this little maid to vex her, burst out into such angry speech that the novice was terrified and ran away.

Then, thinking that it was only her own guilt that had made her betray herself, she tried to pray to Heaven for comfort, but could not. 'Surely I repent,' she said to herself, 'for what is repentance if not a resolve to do better, and never, even in thought, to sin again. Surely I repent, and I have sworn never to see or think of Lancelot again.' But at once her thoughts went back to her first ride with him from Cameliard to Camelot. She saw the blue of the flowers, and heard the songs of the birds. She saw again the gorgeous tents pitched for their midday or evening rest. She heard the pleasant talk of Lancelot as he rode by her side; and at last, as she was thinking of how the King had ridden out from Camelot to meet her and she had said to herself, 'Not like my Lancelot,' there were sounds of horses' hoofs without, and some one cried, 'The King!'

The King! How should she meet one whom she had wronged so deeply. She heard him coming towards her room and knew there was no escape. She dared not look him in the face. Half-fainting with terror and shame, she slipped from her seat and lay upon the floor, her face hidden by her arms, to hear what dreadful sentence he might pronounce. She said no word, but lay shuddering while the King reproached her.

'Happy is it for your father that he died before learning of your unworthiness! Well is it for us both that you have given me no son! Your children are fire and sword, lawlessness and the return of the wild Saxons—those

Saxons whom, when Lancelot was with me, we drove from the land in twelve great battles. And do you know whence I now come ? From waging war with him, who, but for you, would be my best friend. Many a knight of his and mine has fallen in that war ; and many more in my fights with the false Modred. Of those who remain faithful I will leave some here to guard you, for not a hair of your head shall be injured while I live. But for myself, if there is any truth in old prophecies, I go to meet my doom. You have spoilt the whole purpose of my life, so that I care not greatly whether I live or die. Be patient while for your own sake I show you how you have sinned — what great aims you have brought to nothing.

‘ When the Romans left us the country was filled with robbers. A knight here and there would right some wrong, but I was the first to draw them together into one glorious brotherhood of the Round Table, to serve as a model to all the world. I made them swear to lead chaste lives, to love one maiden and do noble deeds in her honour till they won her hand. For I knew that this pure love of man for maid would keep down base thoughts, and teach courtesy and desire of fame and love of truth and all that makes man good and great. Till you came all went well, and I looked for you to help me in my plan. But did you ? Ever since I wedded you my court has gone from bad to worse. Something of this I knew, but now I learn that the opposite of all I wished has prevailed in my court, and all through you ! I must guard my life and my throne, for God has given them to me. But for my own part I care not if I die. What will Camelot be now that all my friends are gone ? How can I live where everything will remind me of you ? Yet I can never take you back again, for all the world believes you unworthy to be Queen, and if I did so it would but tempt others to follow your example.’

He paused. A trumpet sounded in the distance. Guinevere crept a little closer and touched his feet as if asking for pardon. Then he went on :

‘ Yet I did not come here to tell you of your crimes. It almost kills me to see one whom I so loved and honoured lying at my feet. The fierce anger which filled me when I first heard of your flight has gone. I forgive you as God forgives. Seek pardon from Him by penitence and prayer. Believe that I love you still, and leave me one hope—that we shall meet in heaven; and that then you will know that it is I and not Lancelot whom you should love. Leave me that hope. And now that trumpet calls me to march to the far west, and there fight with my nephew Modred. There I shall slay him, and be slain myself or meet some strange mysterious doom. Hither I shall never return. You will see me no more. Farewell! Farewell!’

He stooped over her, and spread out his hands as if to bless her; then she heard his mail-clad feet walk down the gallery, and hurried to the window, hoping to see his face once more. He was on his horse at the gate, telling the Abbess to care for her; but he kept his visor closed, so that all she saw was how the golden dragon on his helmet shone through the rain, and then grew dimmer and dimmer as he rode away.

At last words came to her. ‘ Oh, Arthur!’ she cried, ‘ have you gone, through my sin, to slay and to be slain? I know you now for my own true lord. What shall I do? Shall I kill myself? That will not kill my shame. Whether I live or die my name will ever last—a name of shame. What then? He mentioned hope. Did he mock me? No, he never mocks. He has forgiven me, and if I can destroy the wickedness in my own heart I may be his mate hereafter in heaven. How great he is! And my blinded spirit would not look up to him. Now I see

how far greater he is than Lancelot or any other man who ever breathed. How can I tell him this? I could not dare to do so here even if I could see him. But in heaven I may. That must be my hope.'

Here she felt a hand touch her, and looking down saw the little novice, weeping, and seeking pardon.

'Yea, little maid,' she said, 'for am not I forgiven?'

Then, looking up, she found the nuns around her, weeping for her grief.

'You know me, then,' she said, 'and how wickedly I broke the King's purpose? Shut me in, dear sisters, from the voices of the world, which cry shame upon me. Make me a sister like yourselves. Let me fast when you fast, though I cannot share your festivals. Let me grieve when you grieve, though I cannot rejoice when you rejoice. Let me share your worship and your prayers, and do you pray for me. I will do the meanest work, give alms to the sick who are far less sick than is my own soul, and dress their loathsome sores. Thus by prayer and charity I may do something to make amends for all the ill that I have done.'

So she became a nun, wondering in her own heart, 'Is it yet too late? Can I reach heaven and there see my lord again?' And as time went by, the first wildness of her grief died away, but she was ever sad. And by her kindness to the sick and poor she made such a name among the sisters that when their abbess died they chose Guinevere to take her place. But the hard life she led and her constant fasts broke down her health: and three years later she went to join that Arthur whom she had known too late, where the praise and blame of this world could trouble her no more.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

THE rain and mist through which Guinevere looked at Arthur for the last time lasted for many days. Modred continued to retreat till he could retreat no farther. Before him was the sea. Steep cliffs rose above a wide, sandy beach, much of which was covered by the sea at high tide, and on the upper part of this he pitched his camp. It was a wild, dreary place, where the loose sand was covered with sea-holly and coarse grass. Arthur, who had followed him closely, camped on the cliffs above. Next morning he found a way down to the beach, and there he proposed to fight after a night's rest, for his troops were worn out by their long march across a country which the rain had turned into a swamp.

That night Arthur had a dream. He thought Gawain stood before him and that he greeted him with the words, 'Welcome, my sister's son! I thought you dead, but now I see you alive.' 'Sir,' said Gawain, 'God has given me leave to warn you of your death. If you fight Modred to-morrow there will be a great slaughter, and you yourself will die. Make peace with him for a month, and then Sir Lancelot and his knights will come to help you.' Then Gawain vanished and the King awoke. Should he do as Gawain bade him? He told the dream to Bedivere, who was keeping guard outside his tent; and he said that Gawain was untrustworthy in life, and his ghost would be so too. But when Arthur considered the matter, he thought that it was only through Modred's lying that Lancelot had gone to France and that he had made war

on him. Was it not now his duty to wait, if by so doing he could save the country from Modred's rule and many of his own soldiers from death? So at break of day he sent messengers to Modred asking for a truce for thirty days. Modred was in no haste to fight, as he expected a fresh horde of Saxons to land and help him, so he was ready to agree to the proposal. Neither party trusted the other, however, and each commander gave orders to his men that if they saw any signs of treachery they should attack the enemy at once. And so they stood like two dogs straining at the chains which keep them from fighting, each man peering through the mist for some sign of treachery in the enemy.

Meanwhile Arthur and Modred, each with half-a-dozen knights, met midway between the armies to settle the conditions of the truce. As ill luck would have it, one of Arthur's knights trod on an adder which was hidden in the grass, and it struck at him. Without thinking what he was doing he drew his sword to kill it, and Modred's men, thinking that he was about to attack them, drew theirs. In an instant the two armies rushed forward and the battle began amidst a mist so thick that no man could see ten yards before him.

The fight was a struggle between two disorderly mobs, rather than a battle between disciplined armies. Many were not armed when it broke out, but as soon as a knight had donned his armour and mounted his horse he charged down into the confused mass of men. Each thrust and cut at every man he met, and many slew their own friends in the darkness, thinking they were foes. Small bodies would be cut off and would try to fly, but mistaking the way, would find themselves rushing into the sea or against some steep cliff they could not climb, and so were hacked to pieces by the foe who followed them. The deep roar of the Atlantic waves breaking on the beach was almost

drowned by the noise of battle—the clash of swords, or crashing of some armed knight to the ground, battle-cries, groans of the wounded and dying, and shrieks of helpless men trodden down by the horses of the knights.

Again and again Arthur, followed by the poor remnant of the Round Table, charged right through the ranks of the enemy, and as often as Excalibur was raised some man of Modred's fell to the ground. But no one could say who would be victor, for none could see the battlefield. And so they fought on throughout the short winter day. Towards sunset the mist thinned for a moment, and Arthur came upon Geraint, whose Devonshire men had kept together, and were resting for a few minutes before making another charge. Arthur looked at the enemy and then said, 'Sir Geraint, we shall win. Blow your trumpet and call together as many men as you can. I will ride round to the left flank of the enemy, and when I sound my bugle do you charge them.' Geraint did as he was bid. A good many men were not sorry to leave the fight for a while at the sound of his trumpet, and the enemy, too, were glad of the rest. It was again as dark as ever, so that Modred's men saw nothing of the preparations that were being made.

Suddenly Arthur's bugle was heard. Geraint uttered his terrible war-cry and attacked the enemy in front, while Arthur and his knights charged them from the left. The first attack shook them, and when Arthur's men reached their ranks and plunged through them they thought a new army had come upon the field, and broke, and fled.

Geraint with his foot-soldiers pursued them, but not far. An arrow shot at random passed between the bars of his helmet and he fell—fell as he wished to do, fighting for his beloved King, and in the hour of victory. His men rushed on, eager to avenge his death, and the sound of the battle died away in the distance.

Arthur did not join in the pursuit. Whilst the enemy resisted he always fought like a lion, but he never cared to follow a flying foe. He stood surrounded by his remaining knights—not more than a dozen now—victorious but sad. Suddenly out of the mist rushed Modred and his knights. They were seeking to escape from the field and blundered upon Arthur unawares. Two of them Arthur felled to the ground. Another was struck down by Sir Bedivere. The rest fought with the courage of despair. For half-an-hour the struggle continued till on the one side only Arthur and Bedivere were left alive, and on the other none that they could see.

And now a bitter cold north wind sprang up, driving away the mist, and showing the battlefield in all its horror. The full moon had risen half-an-hour before. The tide was rising, covering up the dead and drowning the dying. Here and there it tossed aloft the arm of some dead man or rolled his empty helmet along the sands. No sound could be heard but the roar of its breakers.

‘Hear that great voice,’ said Arthur. ‘See how the waves beat on those who died for me! Am I King indeed? I seem to reign among the dead.’

‘My King,’ said Bedivere, ‘you are King indeed; and if the dead have Kings I will worship you even when we are dead. But see, yonder is the traitor, your kinsman Modred.’

‘Call him not my kinsman because we are of the same household,’ said Arthur. ‘Those who swore my vows and obeyed me are my kin; and it is well for you that you are faithful in this dark hour. I am King and will do one more kingly act of justice before I pass.’

So saying he strode to where Modred stood upon a heap of slain. Each raised his sword. Excalibur’s last blow lighted on Modred’s shoulder, and nearly cut him in two; but before it fell Modred’s sword came down upon Arthur’s

helmet, beaten thin by many a blow which he had received that day, and cut deep into his skull.

Then, seeing that his master's wound was deep, Sir Bedivere raised him and carried him up a rocky path to a chapel at the top of the cliff. There were marks of the Saxons here. They had broken down the cross and all the ornaments, and even stripped off part of the roof, so that the moon shone down upon the floor. Here Bedivere laid his master on the floor. Then Arthur remembered the words upon his sword, 'Take me,' and 'Cast me away'; so he said to Bedivere,

'My Round Table, the noblest brotherhood the earth has seen, is no more. The men I loved sleep the sleep of death. No more shall we walk about the gardens and halls of Camelot talking of noble deeds. The people whom I made a nation have slain me, though Merlin swore that I should not die, but pass and come again to rule once more. Take Excalibur and fling it into the lake. Then return and tell me what you have seen.'

Sir Bedivere said that it was not well to leave him, wounded and helpless as he was, but that he would obey him. He took the sword and stepped from the chapel into the churchyard without, where many an ancient knight was buried. The chapel was built on a narrow neck of land which separated a great lake from the ocean, and a steep cliff must be descended to reach either. Down to the level of the lake climbed Bedivere, stepping from rock to rock. Then he drew Excalibur from its sheath, and the bright moonlight, shining down through the clear frosty air, made it flash like a torch. Not only was the blade of wonderful brightness, but the hilt and handle were adorned with diamonds and topazes and all kinds of jewels. Bedivere gazed at it in wonder. Could he cast away such a beautiful thing? Why should this splendid piece of jewel-work be wasted thus? So, hiding it in the

rushes that grew by the lake, he slowly returned to the King.

‘Have you done as I bid?’ asked Arthur. ‘What have you seen or heard?’

‘I heard the ripple of the water among the reeds, and the sound of the ocean waves,’ he replied.

‘You are false to your nature and unworthy of your name, for that is not the truth!’ said Arthur. ‘Had you done as I bid, some sign would have followed. It is a shameful thing to lie. Now go again, and, as you love me, do as I have said.’

Again Sir Bedivere climbed down to the lake and walked to and fro thinking deeply.

‘Suppose I cast away this precious thing, what good will it do? Or if I preserve it, what harm? There is great harm done by disobedience; but if the King asks me to do something to his own hurt, must I do it? He is sick and does not know what he is doing. If I keep this sword it may be shown at jousts to keep the memory of him fresh in men’s minds, and it will be told how the Lady of the Lake spent nine years in making it. But if it is lost, what shall we have to remind us of him?’

Deceiving himself in this way, he once more hid the sword; and when the King again asked him what he had seen or heard, he again answered that he had only heard the winds and waters.

Then the King grew angry and reproached him bitterly saying, ‘Miserable, false-hearted knight! When a King is dying his power leaves him. You are the last of my knights and should do the duty of them all; but you disobey me either because you want to steal the jewels, or because, like a girl, you admire the beauty of the hilt. Go and do your duty, or I will arise and slay you with my hands!’

Bedivere knew that the King could not slay him, but



BUT BEFORE IT TOUCHED THE WATER, AN ARM ROSE FROM
THE SURFACE

he feared the anger of one whom he loved and honoured. He knew that he should have obeyed him without question, and, to wipe away his shame, he leapt from rock to rock, and ran across the shore to where Excalibur was hidden. He seized it and, closing his eyes, drew it from its sheath and wheeled it round his head in a glittering circle. Then, casting it from him with all his might, he saw it flash through the air, turning and glistening in the moon's rays. But before it touched the water an arm rose from the surface, caught the sword by its hilt, waved it thrice in the air, and then drew it down and was seen no more.

Then Sir Bedivere hastened gladly to the King, who greeted him with the words :

'Now I can see by your eyes that you have obeyed me. Tell me what you have seen or heard.'

Sir Bedivere answered, 'Sir King, I closed my eyes lest I should be tempted again, for I have never seen anything like that wondrous hilt. Then with both hands I cast the sword away, and when I looked again I saw an arm, clothed in pure white silk. It caught the sword as it fell, waved it three times, and drew it beneath the water.'

Then Arthur, struggling for breath, bade him bear him to the lake ; though he feared that his wound had frozen and that he could not live for what must yet be done. He raised himself on one arm, though with great difficulty, Bedivere watching him with tears in his eyes, too grieved to speak. Then, kneeling down, the knight drew Arthur's arms over his shoulders, and rising bore him through the churchyard.

The rocks, wetted by the mist and rain, were now slippery with ice, and it would have been no easy thing to climb down them even without a burden. But Bedivere was clad in heavy armour, and was carrying an armed man. He made what haste he could, but ever the voice of Arthur murmured in his ear, 'Quick, quick ! I fear it is too late,

and I shall die.' The thought that his own disobedience had caused the delay urged him on. His panting breath steamed up in a cloud in the frosty air, and the rocks echoed the clashing of his armed feet upon them.

He could hear the roar of the waves behind him, while from before came a cry which he could not understand. He reached the beach at last, and no longer needed to fix his eyes upon the ground. Looking up, he saw a long line of light upon the lake running towards the moon: and close to the shore lay a barge all hung with black. As they came nearer they saw that the barge was full of forms all clad in black—perhaps the same as the shining forms which Merlin saw on the ship which brought the baby Arthur to Tintagel many years before. And by them stood three Queens with crowns of gold—the Queens who stood by him at his coronation, of whom it was said that they should help him at his need. And from all these forms rose a wail which seemed to reach the stars.

Arthur bade Bedivere place him on the barge. The three Queens received him, and the fairest of them took his head upon her lap. She loosed his broken helmet and rubbed his cold hands, shedding bitter tears. There he lay with his white face stained with his own blood, his battered armour with that of his enemies—not the mighty Arthur of old days, but, like some column, fallen to the earth and broken, yet still showing how great and beautiful it once had been.

'Alas!' cried Bedivere, 'where shall I hide myself? The good old days are done. Such times have never been since the coming of Christ; and now I am the last of the Round Table; and my sad old age must be spent amongst strangers whose aims and thoughts are other than my King's.'

'The old order changes, and God has many ways of working out His purposes,' said Arthur, 'but I cannot

comfort you. What comfort can I find even for myself? May God accept my efforts and forgive my faults. Pray for my soul, for men are no better than dumb beasts if they do not pray, for their friends as well as for themselves. Earth is linked to Heaven by prayer. And now farewell, my good knight. I am going, if the prophecies are true, to the island of Avilion, where there is neither hail, nor rain, nor snow, nor storm. It lies amid calm seas, and is bright with fair meadows, and there the trees bear fruit and flowers all the year. There I shall be healed of my wound.'

Then the sails were hoisted, and the barge passed away towards the east, where the day was beginning to dawn. The wailing of the Queens and their companions died away. but still Sir Bedivere stood, revolving old memories, till the hull seemed but a black spot against the brightening sky.

'He has gone to be King among the dead,' said he, 'and he will come again.'

And as the thought passed through his mind it seemed to him that from far away in the east came a sound of rejoicing as if some fair city were welcoming a king returning from his wars.